

THE UNFPA WE DECIDE PROGRAMME

A Catalyst for Disability Inclusion





UNFPA works towards a more inclusive world

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, works towards a more inclusive world – one in which persons with disabilities lead efforts to champion their sexual and reproductive health and rights and live free from violence and discrimination. The UNFPA **We Decide** programme is at the heart of this work.

Here, we showcase initiatives that promote meaningful, participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities – from how UNFPA works as an organization, to catalytic initiatives that support partners' efforts to meet the sexual and reproductive health needs of all.

1 BILLION+ PEOPLE
experience disability

about **15%** of the
world's population



The UNFPA We Decide programme is a catalyst for disability inclusion

Over 1 billion people are estimated to experience disability – about 15 per cent of the world’s population. This number is rising due to an increase in chronic health conditions and population ageing. Focusing on the rights of persons with disabilities supports the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, especially the principle of leaving no one behind.

Disability inclusion contributes to the three transformative results of the UNFPA Strategic Plan:

- ▶ **Ending the unmet need for family planning**
- ▶ **Ending preventable maternal deaths**
- ▶ **Ending gender-based violence and harmful practices**

UNFPA is committed to disability inclusion throughout its work to promote equitable access to sexual and reproductive health services and information and addressing gender-based violence.

In 2016, UNFPA launched the **We Decide** programme to promote rights and choices for women and young persons with disabilities. **We Decide** serves as a catalyst for UNFPA to become a disability-inclusive organization, both in terms of programming and internal policies. At global, regional and country level, disability inclusion in UNFPA is more systematic, human rights-based and mainstreamed into all programming.

Mapping the impact of We Decide

The **We Decide** programme works directly with UNFPA regional and country offices.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN REGIONAL OFFICE:

The Visibility, Inclusion and Participation (VIP) Strategy was launched in 2019 to support the implementation of the **We Decide** guidelines.

ECUADOR:

UNFPA supported the development of the handbook in Spanish on comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care for persons with disabilities. Participation by National Councils for Gender Equality and Disability guaranteed gender and inclusion approaches.

EASTERN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA REGIONAL OFFICE:

UNFPA has integrated the **We Decide** guidelines into a package of standards, procedures and guidelines for gender-based violence (GBV) and effective coordination mechanisms. The publication “Multi-sectoral response to GBV” is available in English and in Russian.

MOROCCO:

A UNFPA research action project introduced a disability-related indicator that has been successfully integrated into the national health information system.

By strengthening a specialized centre, young persons with disabilities gained access to sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence services. The centre applied the Essential Services Package for Women and Girls Subject to Violence for women and girls with disabilities based on the **We Decide** guidelines.*

* The 2018 UNFPA publication known as “the We Decide guidelines” is titled **Women and Young Persons with Disabilities: Guidelines for Providing Rights-Based and Gender-Responsive Services to Address Gender-Based Violence and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for Women and Young Persons with Disabilities**. Available from: www.unfpa.org/featured-publication/women-and-young-persons-disabilities

Mapping the impact of We Decide

The **We Decide** programme works directly with UNFPA regional and country offices.

MOZAMBIQUE:

A comprehensive accessibility review of health centres resulted in an Action Plan to enhance inclusiveness and accessibility, including structural modifications, use of equipment with universal design features, communication of information in accessible formats and accessible service provision.

ARAB STATES REGIONAL OFFICE:

Collaboration with Women Enabled International led to a series of sensitization webinars for regional staff on the different dimensions of disability, sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender and youth.

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC REGIONAL OFFICE:

UNFPA delivered and piloted a fully accessible disability data advocacy and disability data literacy training in Asia and the Pacific and provided post-training country support.

WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA REGIONAL OFFICE:

Training and support enabled UNFPA Country Offices to tailor and disseminate international tools, guidelines and instruments on disability, including the **We Decide** guidelines.

EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA REGIONAL OFFICE:

The Breaking the Silence (BtS) approach to comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) supports facilitators and teachers to provide CSE to learners with disabilities.

How the We Decide programme works

We Decide aims to strengthen disability-inclusive prevention and response to gender-based violence, and to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights at global, regional and national levels. The programme works to produce three main outputs:



1. Mainstreaming and targeted action

Strengthen capacity to mainstream disability inclusion and implement disability-specific interventions at all levels.

- **We Decide** has developed numerous resources to support **evidence-based advocacy** and ensure that bodily autonomy is a reality for persons with disabilities. These briefs, infographics, key messages and guidelines show how to support women and young persons with disabilities in claiming their right to exercise bodily autonomy. These resources can be found at www.unfpa.org.
- UNFPA provides **technical assistance to Ministries of Health** to update technical norms and standards on gender-based violence, integrate the health sector response for persons with disabilities, and ensure that standard operating procedures for the health, policy and social sectors are disability inclusive.
- UNFPA works to improve the **training of health personnel** to deliver rights-based and disability-inclusive sexual and reproductive health services and establishes multi-sectoral standard operating procedures and accountability systems.
- UNFPA **builds knowledge through workshops and webinars**. A series of regional webinars focused on disability-inclusive responses

"I was born with HIV and when I was two years old, I had a relapse so severe that my legs and arms arched, and my tongue got stuck. Because of this I have difficulty speaking. My life changed when I met my mentor who invited me to attend the girls' meetings that she holds here in the neighbourhood. There I made many friendships and discovered that I could be happy."

Zainura Júlio Fábula,
Mozambique

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Anders Brown, 2022



to COVID-19 and future pandemics, engaging an audience of United Nations agencies, organizations of persons with disabilities, civil society organizations and government representatives. The workshops provided materials based on a **study** that focused on young persons with disabilities from four countries in the **We Decide** programme.



2. Positioning and policy dialogue

Strengthen positioning of disability-inclusive prevention and response to gender-based violence and advance sexual and reproductive health and rights at all levels.

At the **2022 Global Disability Summit**, UNFPA shared good practices and the lived experiences of persons with disabilities from the **We Decide** programme. UNFPA and partners including Norway collaborated on **social media**, communications and side events where persons with disabilities and partners shared their activism, experiences, challenges and solutions for ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

UNFPA amplifies messages through exhibits such as **Wanted: A World for One Billion**. This is a **multi-sensory exhibit** of photographs, audio recordings and immersive films, featuring stories, work and art from persons with disabilities, especially youth and women from Morocco, Ecuador, Mozambique and the United States. The Exhibit was first launched at the UN Website on the occasion of the Global Disability

Summit in February 2022 in partnership with Spain, Norway, Women Enabled International and Dysturb. The Exhibit was replicated in the form of **digital animations running on 330 screens in subway stations** across Oslo, Norway for five days in February 2022, and in 45 screens around the city of Helsinki for one week in October 2022. The Exhibit was also displayed in the form of a gallery at the UN Secretariat Building in New York City in December 2022.

UNFPA plays an active role in **side events** and activities of the Conference of States Parties to the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (CRPD). UNFPA side events highlight the equal rights and importance of the participation of persons with disabilities and showcase interventions by partners in countries all over the world, featuring the work of **We Decide**.

UNFPA provides **thought leadership** on sexual and reproductive health and rights and disability inclusion in the development community, and among United Nations agencies sharing knowledge generated through **We Decide** and participating in joint initiatives of the UN Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD).

Good quality disability and gender **data** is a prerequisite for advocacy and for programmes that are fit-for-purpose for women and young persons with disabilities. The **We Decide** programme strengthens disability data literacy and contributes to overall population data collection and analysis, including advocating for the integration of the Washington Group questions in censuses .¹



3. Participation

Establish or strengthen innovative mechanisms and capacities for systemic engagement and participation of women and young persons with disabilities and Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs).

The **We Decide** programme works to **co-create activities with women and young persons with disabilities** to increase their participation in all matters that concern them. UNFPA provides technical and financial support to the Global Network of Youth with Disabilities to enhance

¹ The United Nations Statistical Commission adopted methodological guidelines for data collection on disability in 2015. These guidelines are to be applied in national censuses and surveys, and present recommendations and specific questions developed by the Washington Group on Disability Statistics, a team of experts from National Statistical Offices and other partners created by the UN Statistical Commission following the United Nations International Seminar on the Measurement of Disability in 2001. The main purpose of the Washington Group is, therefore, the promotion and coordination of international cooperation in the area of health statistics focusing on disability measures suitable for censuses and national surveys. The major objective is to provide basic necessary information on disability which is comparable throughout the world.

the leadership of young persons with disabilities and their meaningful participation in the disability inclusion agenda. The network promotes youth diversity, accessible engagement and the rights of young persons with disabilities.

UNFPA supports **establishing platforms for stronger engagement** of women and young persons with disabilities in the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action. For instance, in the Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office, a regional meeting on inclusive health for persons with disabilities was conducted based on the CRPD, the ICPD Programme of Action, the Montevideo Consensus and the 2030 Agenda.

Mapping of OPDs is ongoing at different levels at UNFPA to identify their needs and strengths and their work related to the ICPD Programme of Action. **Partnerships with OPDs** are increasingly being formalized and structural barriers to such partnerships are being removed.



UNFPA is becoming more disability inclusive

Persons with disabilities are participating more actively in UNFPA operations and programmes, and UNFPA is mainstreaming disability across programmes, interventions and the organizational culture. The **We Decide** programme has been catalytic in inspiring this change.



We are... generating data and evidence

Conducting research and disaggregating data by disability and gender are crucial to understanding gender and disability as systemic drivers of sexual and reproductive health inequalities.

The proportion of censuses globally that include questions on disability increased from 33 per cent in 2018 to 73 per cent in 2020, a sign of advocacy by UNFPA and our partners. In the 2020 census round (2015–2024), UNFPA committed to promoting disability inclusion in censuses with questions from [The Washington Group](#) on Disability Statistics. This is an important entry point for collecting data on disability.

- Data collected as a requirement of UNFPA Strategic Plan reporting shows significant progress on the outcome: “UNFPA will improve national population data systems to map and address inequalities”.
- At UNFPA Regional Offices, all Regional Strategic Programmes (2022–2025) identify disability as a factor that must be addressed as a “furthest behind” factor and highlight the specific rights and needs of persons with disabilities in several outputs in accordance with the UNFPA Strategic Plan and the Leaving No One Behind Operational Plan.

“When women with disabilities meet, they can sit together, share together and discuss what can be done for gender-based violence. Alone it is difficult to respond.”

Ruth Mkutumulam,
Disabled Women in Africa (DIWA),
Malawi



We are... engaging

- Engagement with policymakers and legislators is addressing the intersections of disability, age and gender in policies that support the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and young persons with disabilities.
- Engagement with a range of other actors, including United Nations agencies, has enabled UNFPA to support a comprehensive and multisectoral disability-inclusive response to gender-based violence and promote sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- UNFPA participates in United Nations inter-agency teams working on disability, including the UNPRPD, which UNFPA is chairing from October 2022 to October 2024, the **Reference Group** on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, the Interagency group for the UN Disability Strategy (UNDIS), United Nations Inter-agency Group on Gender Equality and Disability Inclusion, and the Youth 2030 Disability Task Team.



We are... building partnerships

- Many UNFPA Country Offices are partnering with OPDs or coalitions of OPDs. UNFPA and Women Enabled International partnered with eight national and regional OPDs to conduct a **study** on the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls with disabilities. Consultations with over 300 persons with disabilities took place globally
- UNFPA and the Special Olympics brings together girls with and without intellectual disabilities to play sports, overcome stigma and become more empowered to claim their rights. This partnership began in Eastern Europe and Central Asia and is being explored in other regions.



We are... changing the way we work

- The UNFPA Asia and the Pacific Regional Office and the UNFPA Country Office in Ecuador are institutionalizing accessibility in webinars and meetings. The Regional Office has established long-term agreements with sign language and closed captioning service providers. The Country Office also organized an accessibility workshop that was conducted with other United Nations offices in Ecuador.

- UNFPA digital content accessibility guidelines are implemented and available to all UNFPA staff. Website accessibility has improved through an accessibility menu available at www.unfpa.org. In addition, all Google Workspace applications (e.g. email, calendar, chat, conferencing and office productivity software) are accessible and apply the Google [guidelines](#) for accessibility.
- Physical accessibility to UNFPA premises is being addressed. In 2020, UNFPA assessed all main offices, ranked them against physical accessibility criteria and prioritized them for capital improvements and adaptations. This work built on a 2019 survey by the Facilities Management Team that identified potential challenges to physical access to events and use of the buildings.



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Carlos Machili, 2022

Expanding partnership for disability inclusion

UNFPA stands for rights and choices for all and will continue to innovate, advocate and ensure persons with disabilities everywhere live free from violence and discrimination and can access their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Funding will be crucial to ensure gains are sustainable and can scale. Together with valued partners, UNFPA will work towards a world where gender equality is realized and all women and young persons, including those with disabilities are empowered to exercise their rights free from violence, discrimination and harmful practices. Achieving this vision will require complementarity and active cooperation among all partners.

Leveraging on its catalytic role, We Decide is positioned to strengthen disability inclusion in UNFPA and through programming, working in key focus areas:

“How can we ensure everyone realizes their rights and choices? What must happen to make services accessible, and to open equal opportunities to live and thrive? How do we rid societies of the stigma and discrimination that persons with disabilities all too often face? As we seek to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, these are questions that we must answer – and act on – urgently.”

Dr. Natalia Kanem,
Executive Director,
UNFPA



CAPACITY BUILDING

- Strengthening capacity to mainstream disability inclusion and implement disability-specific interventions at the global, regional and country level.
- Expanding the **We Decide** programme into additional UNFPA Country Offices that will benefit from the experience, tools and good practices of Ecuador, Morocco and Mozambique.
- Establishing a critical mass of trained stakeholders to provide rights-based and gender-responsive services, with a roll out of curriculum on the **We Decide** guidelines.
- Supporting the development of a more disability-inclusive organizational culture at UNFPA.



- Developing standards and technical norms for rights-based and gender-responsive services. Special attention will be given to operationalizing the Inter-agency Standing Committee's Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action across UNFPA humanitarian assistance.



ADVOCACY AND POLICY DIALOGUE

- Strengthening positioning and policy dialogues on disability-inclusive prevention and response to gender-based violence and advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights at all levels.
- Engaging with policymakers and legislators to address the intersections of disability, age and gender.
- Strengthening UNFPA leadership at Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by organizing, convening and participating in events that focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender-based violence and bodily autonomy of women and young persons with disabilities.
- Campaigning for the equal rights and opportunities of women and young persons with disabilities by showing the Wanted: A World for One Billion exhibit in select locations worldwide.



DATA AND EVIDENCE

- Establishing new and innovative data and evidence to strengthen global positioning and advocacy on disability and gender.
- Conducting novel data analysis using national demographic and health surveys and census data from a growing number of countries. The disability data literacy skills of policymakers and other stakeholders, including OPDs, will also be strengthened.
- Strengthening inter-agency collaboration on disability inclusion and working jointly to integrate analytics on gender perspectives in the implementation of the UNDIS.

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INNOVATION AND DIGITALIZATION

- Engaging young persons with disabilities to take the lead in innovating for autonomy and access to essential services, humanitarian and emergency aid and information and communications technology specifically related to e-health information.
- Developing accessible and disability-inclusive digital spaces for youth advocacy on sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender-based violence.
- Highlighting the role of young persons with disabilities in formulating user-centred design, innovations in technology and social innovations to improve their social status and overcome negative attitudes and other barriers to information and services.

RESOURCES:

Strategies, plans, and resources guiding the We Decide programme

Across UNFPA, strategies and guidance take disability into account – from the disaggregation of data by disability, to the analysis of discrimination and exclusion in gender-transformative approaches, to a focus on adolescents and youth.

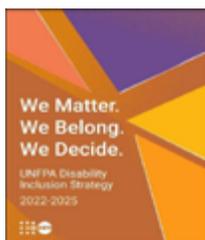
In UNFPA, the We Decide programme works to advance the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS) and the principle of leaving no one behind. The programme has developed guidelines, briefs, videos, infographics and key messages on how to support women and young persons with disabilities realize their sexual and reproductive health and rights, while gender-based violence prevention and response is also strengthened.

Strategies and policies on disability inclusion



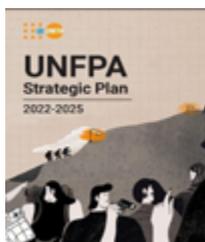
United Nations Disability
Inclusion Strategy

Through the UNDIS, UNFPA reaffirms that the full and complete realization of the human rights of all persons with disabilities is an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Adopted in June 2019, the strategy includes a policy and an accountability framework, with benchmarks to assess progress and accelerate change on disability inclusion. The UNDIS enables UNFPA, and the entire United Nations system, to support the implementation of the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** and other international human rights instruments. In UNFPA, the **We Decide** programme falls under our work to advance the UNDIS.



UNFPA Disability Inclusion Strategy, 2022–2025

The strategy sets a new standard for UNFPA operations and programmes. It puts persons with disabilities at the centre of everything UNFPA does, accelerating the kind of organizational change that welcomes diversity and ensures equality. An Easy Read version is available in English, French and Spanish. Tools and resources for implementing the strategy are available at: www.un.org/en/disabilitystrategy/resources.



UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022–2025

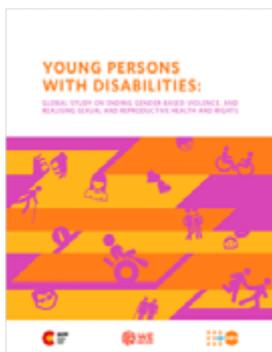
The strategic plan calls for strengthening disability inclusion in all areas of the UNFPA mandate. Since 2018, the strategic plan has been disability inclusive, with an emphasis on reaching the furthest behind. The strategic plan commits “to build in-house expertise and promote inclusive practices to accelerate the mainstreaming of disability into UNFPA programming and operations, including by providing more accessible facilities and information”.



Leaving No One Behind Operational Plan

This plan serves as a guide for UNFPA to ensure that those furthest behind, including persons with disabilities, enjoy sexual and reproductive health and rights by prioritizing and addressing intersectional, persistent and extreme disadvantage, discrimination and disempowerment.

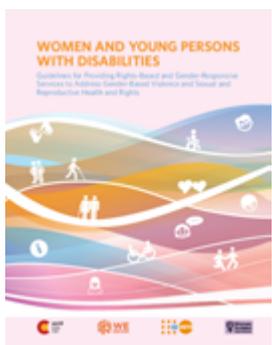
Programmatic and operational guidance and resources



Young Persons with Disabilities: Global Study

This global study has been widely used for advocacy and policy dialogue to promote rights and inform programming. It highlights progress at the regional and national level and provides checklists for action for stakeholders and policymakers.

More than 70 countries have implemented the We Decide guidelines.



Women and Young Persons with Disabilities

Often called “the **We Decide** guidelines”, this publication by UNFPA and Women Enabled International provides practical and concrete guidance on the provision of inclusive and accessible services for gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights. Recommendations are provided for low-, middle- and high-resource settings, as well as humanitarian emergency settings.



We Decide ENGAGE multimedia presentation package

A project of **We Decide**, UNFPA and the Population Reference Bureau (PRB), *The Path to Equality for Women and Young Persons with Disabilities* features a **video**, **key messages handout** and **presentation guide**. It describes the policy changes and investments needed to support the full range of rights and protections for women and young persons with disabilities. American Sign Language videos and audio narration files are available.



COVID-19 and Persons with Disabilities: Key Messages

This infographic features key messages and a companion [video](#). The infographic has had thousands of views on the UNFPA website.



Disability and the Right to Bodily Autonomy

This advocacy brief provides global guidance to ensure bodily autonomy is a reality for persons with disabilities. In terms of sexual and reproductive health, this is the power to make basic decisions about one's body and health, such as whether or not to engage in sexual relations. Available [here](#).



Think Accessibility! UNFPA Communication and Engagement Guidelines on Accessibility

These guidelines help everyone who works at and with UNFPA to incorporate accessibility into their communication activities. This resource incorporates the UNDIS Communications Guidelines and topics include terminology, universal design, content accessibility, mobile access and virtual and physical accessibility. This guidance is available in English, French and Spanish. Available [here](#).



Disability Inclusion in UNFPA's Programmes: Making it a Reality

This technical brief highlights practices for advancing disability-inclusive gender-transformative and rights-based programming. It also showcases success stories and lessons learned about the work that has been carried out on disability inclusion. Publication forthcoming. Available [here](#).



Wanted: A World for One Billion

This multisensory exhibit features photographs, audio recordings and immersive films about the lives of persons with disabilities who live beyond their limits and ignite change for themselves and future generations. Visiting Ecuador, Morocco and Mozambique, the objective of the exhibit is to build momentum and raise awareness around the sexual and reproductive health and rights and bodily autonomy of women and young persons with disabilities, highlighting their voices and experiences and promoting their meaningful participation.

For more information about disability inclusion, visit the UNFPA website:
www.unfpa.org/disabilities-inclusion

UNFPA would like to express appreciation for the support provided by the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) for We Decide since its launch in 2016.

Abbreviations and acronyms

CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSE	Comprehensive sexuality education
GBV	Gender-based violence
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
OPD	Organizations of persons with disabilities
SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health and rights
UNDIS	United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNPRPD	UN Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities



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