



# DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION TIPS TOOLS INSIGHTS PRACTICES

## In practice

# FROM INCLUSION TO STRUCTURAL CHANGE: AUSTRALIA'S SUPPORT TO DISABILITY EQUITY AND RIGHTS

### Key messages

Australia has made disability equity and rights a priority of its international development co-operation. In addition to dedicated strategies to mainstream disability considerations into its programming, Australia tactically leverages its influence, funding and partnerships to steer global attention towards disability equity and rights, and social inclusion.

### Keywords

Civil society | Poverty and inequality | Gender equality

### Key partner

Australia

### Challenge

According to the World Health Organization, “an estimated [1.3 billion people – about 16% of the global population](#) – currently experience significant disability.” With population ageing and an increase in the prevalence of non-communicable diseases, this number is increasing. People with disabilities [are more likely to live in poverty](#) than persons without disabilities due to barriers such as discrimination, limited access to education and employment. Yet disability inclusion has garnered less recognition in international policy frameworks compared to some other forms of inequality. In developing countries, disability movements often lack visibility, and their representation tends to be fragmented due to the diverse nature of disabilities. When disability inclusion is primarily considered as a health issue or a matter of social protection, it becomes difficult to mainstream. To address these challenges, Australia has embedded a specific focus on disability equity and rights within its development co-operation policy – one of the few Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members to do so.

## Approach

Australia is a long-standing champion of [gender equality, disability and social inclusion \(GEDSI\)](#). Gender equality and disability equity benefit from high political commitment at national level, as illustrated by:

- **Australia's third strategy on disability focusing on equity and rights.** This differs from and builds on previous approaches that emphasised disability inclusion in Australia's development programmes. The 2024 [International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy](#), rooted in broad and inclusive consultation, prioritises outcomes that "remove barriers for people with disability so that they can fully and equitably participate in and contribute to society." A stronger commitment to both equity and rights is potentially more transformative as it strives to secure equal rights and promote and influence systemic change.
- **Integration of disability across Australia's international engagement.** Australia's policy priority on disability inclusion dates back to 2008. Since then, Australia's commitment has continued to increase across different dimensions of its international engagement, well beyond development co-operation, to include trade, foreign policy, humanitarian efforts, disaster risk reduction and climate action.
- **Development of [good practice notes](#) to guide staff and partners in the operationalisation of its strategy.** This guidance allows staff of Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to embrace disability as a policy priority that also covers social protection, health and trade policies and programmes. Thematic notes on [disability in programme design](#), [reasonable accommodation](#) and [climate change](#), support the operationalisation of these policies.
- **Setting ambitious targets linked to GEDSI.** Australia's 2023 International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy sets out a phased performance target on disability equity in its international development programme of 60% of development and humanitarian investments performing effectively on disability equity by 2026, and 70% by 2030. DFAT assesses progress through its annual [Performance Reporting rounds](#), using the OECD-DAC policy marker on disability.

## Results

Australia's International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy is well received and understood by its partners. Partners are progressively integrating DFAT strategies on disability equity and rights into their programmes as well as in their engagement with the government and technical authorities, for example on education.

- **Strengthened civil society capacity on disability equity and rights.** Through support to programmes such as the [Australia-Indonesia Partnership Towards an Inclusive Society \(INKLUSI\)](#), DFAT assists civil society organisations, including organisations of people with disability, to mobilise around integration issues and work with government to strengthen access to basic services, helping women, people with disability and marginalised groups participate in government policy and planning processes. In the Pacific, Australia also supports the [Pacific Disability Forum](#), an umbrella organisation of Pacific Organisations of Persons with Disabilities, to enable their members to advocate for and advance their rights.
- **Innovation is mobilised to serve people with disability.** DFAT's partnership with [ATscale](#), the Global Partnership for Assistive Technology, has expanded the provision of assistance technology through integrated screening and access to vision, hearing and mobility aids for school-aged children, while strengthening national systems, market development and workforce capacity.
- **Better data is resulting in more informed policies and programmes.** By supporting [UNICEF's statistical overview of children with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific](#), Australia strengthens the quality,

availability and use of data on children with disabilities. Support to national statistics offices also facilitates the collection, analysis, sharing and use of disability disaggregated data needed by governments to make informed policy decisions on inclusion.

- **More inclusive global policy frameworks.** Australia has played a significant role in disability-inclusive development globally. Australia advocated in the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit to integrate disability into humanitarian work. Its involvement with disaster risk reduction also influenced the [Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action](#). DFAT was an early signatory to the [Amman-Berlin Declaration on Global Disability Inclusion](#) in 2025. Australia also advocated for and funded the development of the [United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy](#), launched in 2019.

### Lessons learnt

- **Credibility as an advocate can help to drive policy change.** Australia's long-term commitment, cross-government policy coherence, effective alliance building with other DAC members, leveraging of influence in the multilateral system, and consistent funding are all required for effectively steering global attention to disability inclusion.
- **Highly committed and informed staff are the foundation of a strong global reputation.** For the implementation of its first two disability strategies, DFAT had a dedicated Disability Inclusion Section in the Development Policy Division. For the implementation of its third strategy, DFAT has mainstreamed disability staff across its GEDSI analysis and other parts of the development programme, embedding disability work into broader equality and inclusion efforts. DFAT's GEDSI staff are engaged broadly, developing strong international relationships. DFAT's engagement at Australian missions in Geneva and New York also helped influence and leverage the UN system on disability inclusion issues.
- **Inclusive engagement with relevant stakeholders helps design good strategy.** Australia consulted with people with disabilities and organisations of people with disabilities to develop its International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy. Guided by the principle that nothing about disability shall be decided without the voice of people with disability, consultation was held through public consultation and regional workshops in Asia and in the Pacific. An External Reference Group of disability organisations oversaw and advised the process through consultations and public submissions.
- **Improving disability inclusion requires societal changes in beliefs and attitudes.** Globally, efforts on disability inclusion remain under-resourced, and progress has been uneven. Achieving [inclusive governance](#) and effectively tackling disability inequity demands broad societal support to drive, legitimise and sustain change. A comprehensive strategy that combines diverse partnerships and funding is essential to mobilise development co-operation for transformative impact on complex social challenges.

### Further information

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## OECD resources

OECD (forthcoming), *OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Australia 2025*.

OECD (2022), *Disability, Work and Inclusion: Mainstreaming in All Policies and Practices*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1eaa5e9c-en>.

OECD (2020), *The OECD-DAC policy marker on the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities: Handbook for data reporters and users*, [https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD/DAC/STAT\(2020\)48/en/pdf](https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD/DAC/STAT(2020)48/en/pdf).

### To learn more about Australia's development co-operation, see:

OECD, "Australia", *Development Co-operation Profiles*, OECD Publishing, Paris, [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/development-co-operation-profiles\\_04b376d7-en/australia\\_b4d74d53-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/development-co-operation-profiles_04b376d7-en/australia_b4d74d53-en.html).

More *In Practice* examples from *Australia* are available on [Development Co-operation TIPs • Tools Insights Practices](#).

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