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Contribution to the European Commission's consultation for the next European Disability Strategy

Submission by: Bridging the Gap II - Inclusive policies
and services for equal rights of persons with disabilities

This contribution is formally submitted by the Director of European project
Bridging the Gap II on behalf of the project consortium.

Bridging the Gap II (BtG-II) is an initiative funded by the European Union
coordinated by the International and Ibero-American Foundation for
Administration and Public Policies (FIIAPP) in partnership with the Spanish
Agency for Development Cooperation (AECID), the Austrian Development
Agency (ADA), the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (IADC), the
European Disability Forum (EDF) and the International Disability and
Development Consortium (IDDC). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland and
the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (UNOHCR) also
contribute to the initiative.

Bridging the Gap II aims to contribute to the socio-economic inclusion, equality
and non-discrimination of persons with disabilities through more inclusive and
accountable institutions and policies.

BtG-II supports the mainstreaming of disability in international cooperation and
the efforts of the public institutions and civil society organisations of five partner
countries (Burkina Faso, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Paraguay and Sudan) in planning
and implementing inclusive policies and services.

More information about the project can be found on the official website
www.bridgingthegap-project.eu





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Opportunities to deliver on commitments

Official statistics estimate that over a billion people (or about 15% of the world's population) live with disability¹. Persons with disabilities amount to 80 million people in Europe (16% of the European population). According to current demographic trends, the number of persons with disabilities will increase from 80 million to 120 million by 2020². Lower-income countries have a higher prevalence of disability than higher-income countries. Disability is more common among women, older people, children and adults who are poor³. Disability and poverty fuel each other in a vicious circle that must be broken to ensure that no one is left behind.

The European Union (EU) and every Member State of the Union are parties to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its article 4 requires State Parties 'to adopt all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the CRPD', across all their policies and programmes, including their external action. The CRPD contains an article 32 precisely on international cooperation, through which States parties commit themselves to undertake appropriate and effective measures to make international development programmes inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities.

As the world's biggest donor, the EU must strengthen its commitment on implementing the CRPD and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) worldwide and ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities in its international development cooperation and humanitarian action. The need for a resolute commitment is reinforced by the fact that almost all partner countries in which the EU operates through its EU delegations abroad have themselves either signed or ratified the CRPD and seek for EU's support in order to improve the implementation and monitoring of the Convention in their country. **The next EU Disability Strategy shall thus count on a reinforced external action dimension** whose principles and objectives shall be funnelled into the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and post-2020 regulations.

¹ World Health Organisation and the World Bank, World Report on Disability, 2011

² Parliamentary questions, 12 October 2018, Question for oral answer O-000117/2018

³ Source: World Health Organisation, 10 Facts on Disability, 2017





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Priority areas for action

Based upon the work conducted so far under Bridging the Gap, it is recommended that the EU considers the following actions for the new EU Disability Strategy's external action:

Short-term actions

- Ensuring no European funds are invested externally in creating or exacerbating barriers or segregation or institutionalisation for persons with disabilities (i.e.: ensure full compliance with the CRPD) and make sure persons with disabilities and their representative organisations are consulted and meaningfully involved in all processes. This includes ensuring all programmes and investments are fully inclusive and accessible. In each EU Delegation, a focal point for disability should be clearly identified and trained (and information about their mandate should be made visible to the public/representative organisations of persons with disabilities). The EU's commitment to Rights based approach needs to be fully applied in all new financing to ensure persons with disabilities are not left behind.
- Use the opportunity of the new Commission to place disability inclusion in the centre-stage of the external Directorates' work, using the EU's obligations under the CRPD, the SDGs, the EU Consensus for Development, the implementation of the new disability marker on disability inclusion in development cooperation and the new [UN Disability Inclusion Strategy](#) as drivers.
- Gathering evidence on inclusion of persons with disabilities. Well-tested data collection tools are available, such as the [Washington Group set of Questions](#) or [the indicators elaborated under Bridging the Gap](#), which can be used to gather evidence and monitor CRPD implementation respectively.
- Consider convening and/or reinvigorating a disability interest group in DG DEVCO/NEAR/ECHO and EEAS, alongside other EU institutions, to offer opportunities for peer support on the issue among the organisation's staff, and appoint a rotational leadership to the group. Based upon the experience of the



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group of interest, create a disability inclusion helpdesk. A network of disability focal points should be formed.

- Implementing the OECD DAC disability policy marker, including across Member States, to track development finance in support of persons with disabilities, and leverage on the OECD DAC's coordination meeting with Member States in this end by setting milestones.
- All EU institutions, including EU Delegations should be fully accessible to persons with disabilities or define an accessibility plan to become so.
- Ensure specific attention to the most marginalised groups of persons with disabilities and intersecting inequalities (women and girls, children, indigenous people, deaf-blinds, etc.)

Longer-term actions

- Strengthening EU global leadership on disability-inclusive development and humanitarian action by assigning this responsibility to a decision-making level. Disability inclusive strategies and plans shall be developed and disability inclusion ensured.
- Strengthening the technical capacity on disability inclusion across DEVCO units and desks, ECHO, the EU Delegations abroad and the EU External services. Organise specific sensitization and awareness-raising trainings addressed to all staff, with particular regard to Directors and Heads of Units, also by making use of e-learning, webinars, DEVCO Learning Academy, etc.
- Provide clear guidance for disability mainstreaming in the evaluation of all external and internal project proposals, in order to ensure that they incorporate a disability inclusion standpoint from the earliest possible stage.
- Improving the inclusion of the rights of persons with disabilities in EU capacity development programmes.
- Existing action plans on gender equality and human rights should be revised to well reflect disability-inclusion, in close consultation with organisations of persons with disabilities and wider civil society.



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- Develop a system of disability champions in the EU institutions to highlight good practices worth replicating and to foster synergies and complementarities among EU bodies.
- Identify champions of disability inclusion among EU delegations and create an award in this category during the annual communication awards ceremony.

