In 2023, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction conducted a study on disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction (DiDRR) policy and practice in Africa.

The study provides an account of progress, gaps and promising practices in including persons with disabilities in disaster risk reduction (DRR) in the region. It concludes with policy recommendations for Member States and other key stakeholders, building on findings from the 2023 Global Survey Report on Persons with Disabilities and Disasters, stakeholder consultations in Kenya, Ethiopia, Togo and Cameroon and a DiDRR report 1 including analysis from Niger, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

- Review period: 2015–2023
- Data collection/analysis: July to September 2023
- Stakeholders engaged: 58 participants, including 18 persons with disabilities and their representative organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), and governments, national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), United Nations agencies and donors
- Documents screened: 103 country-specific and regional documents
- In-depth review: 70 reviewed
- Interviews/Focus groups: 31 interviews, six focus groups; English and French

The study design, data collection and analysis are based on the following key inclusion criteria, which closely aligns with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030.

Key findings

The study identified the following key findings.

1. Understanding disaster risk

   - Despite the emerging rights-based approach to disability, persons with disabilities are often still seen as “vulnerable groups” rather than stakeholders contributing to DRR, due to the prevailing stigma of disability reported strongly across Africa.
   - There is a lack of consideration of intersectionality and understanding of risk drivers and vulnerability.
   - There is limited practical knowledge and capacity for disability inclusion among DRR practitioners, particularly at the local level.
   - Insufficient awareness among persons with disabilities and OPDs hinders their engagement in DRR.
   - There are emerging trends in disability data collection using functioning approaches and tools such as the Washington Group Short Set questions on national population censuses and surveys.
   - There are little reliable disability data due to cultural stigma, resource constraints, capacity issues and lack of involvement of OPDs in data collection.
   - Disability data for risk assessment and planning is underutilized due to coordination challenges and siloed approaches to data collection and exchange.

2. Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk

   - Enhanced awareness and political commitment to disability inclusion results in the integration of disability considerations into DRR policies and strategic frameworks.
   - Challenges translating policy commitments into practice, due to resource constraints and competing priorities, particularly in protracted humanitarian crises.
   - Emphasis on the necessity to develop technical guidelines for the adoption of DiDRR at the national level.
   - Increased engagement and consultations with persons with disabilities, notably in regional and global platforms, although limited and inaccessible mechanisms for participation persist.
   - A notable interest among persons with disabilities in participating in DRR policymaking and practice.
   - Capacity constraints and limited resources, as well as physical, communication, attitudinal and institutional barriers impede meaningful contributions by persons with disabilities and their OPDs.
   - Unequal and inadequate partnerships between OPDs and other DRR stakeholders, with OPDs frequently engaged late in the process, funded indirectly and limited to roles in project implementation and event planning.
3. Investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience

- Despite positive trends in prioritizing disability inclusion, there is insufficient investment by governments, national and international NGOs and donors in this area.

- Limited financial, human and technical resources present significant challenges to the advancement of DiDRR in the region.

- The remaining misconception that persons with disabilities constitute an insignificant percentage of the population, thus not warranting attention, can lead to a lack of funding allocation for disability inclusion due to prioritization of other issues.

- DiDRR initiatives, primarily led by national and international NGOs, tend to be reactive and project-based, lacking sustainability and institutionalization.

- While donors increasingly prioritize inclusiveness aligning with the Sendai Framework and the 2030 Agenda, there is a lack of direct funding for OPDs.

- Physical barriers and a lack of reasonable accommodation hinder participation, with inaccessible infrastructure also posing safety concerns.

- The lack of investment in rehabilitation and assistive devices is a barrier to participation in disaster preparedness planning and resilience-building initiatives.

- Language differences pose an additional challenge, necessitating translations into English, French, Portuguese and various local languages and African sign languages.

- The Making Cities Resilient initiative, a partnership approach spanning DRR, settlement, development and other sectors, exemplifies inclusion through participatory planning and inclusive settlement design.

4. Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to build back better

- Inadequate disaster preparedness for persons with disabilities, often due to a lack of accessible, tailored risk information.

- Limited outreach and accessible communication during disaster warnings, with deaf communities particularly underserved.

- Local solutions and community-driven initiatives for accessible early warning systems, such as county system audits, engaging community health promoters with disabilities and local community leaders in promoting inclusion and facilitating the dissemination of early warning messages, are available, albeit limited.

- Early stages of the Early Warnings For All initiative reveals a need for improved outreach and communication in disability inclusion.
Key recommendations

1. Adopt a multidimensional approach to address underlying risk factors and key drivers of vulnerability among persons with disabilities. Consider the intersection of diverse identity factors, including gender, age, disability, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, displacement and more when promoting comprehensive strategies to mitigate disaster risk.

2. Take into account the complex sociocultural and humanitarian contexts when mainstreaming disability inclusion in DRR. Similarly, consider the implications of conflict and disaster in all-inclusive development programmes as a means to introduce DRR and garner the interest of local OPDs.

3. Establish mechanisms for formalizing commitments to DiDRR through close collaboration between governments, OPDs, national and international NGOs, United Nations agencies, donors and other key DRR stakeholders.

4. Develop clear guidelines for Member States to adopt disability-inclusive DRR at the national level.

5. Ensure systematic resource allocation to build capacities, institutions and mechanisms for mainstreaming disability inclusion in DRR, while addressing barriers hindering effective inclusion.

6. Ensure the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in DRR by establishing accessible communication channels, consultation platforms and tailored support to enable their active engagement throughout all phases of disaster risk management.

7. Address issues related to disability data collection and utilization in DRR, focusing on reducing cultural stigma, securing adequate resources, building capacity, fostering the active involvement of OPDs and improving coordination among key stakeholders for reliable data collection and exchange.

8. Make meaningful investments in OPDs at all levels to enhance their capacities. This may involve initiating with small grants or exploring pooled funding in collaboration with international OPDs, with funds directly accessible to national and local OPDs. This funding should also cover non-project-related costs for capacity-building, separate from project delivery.

9. Mainstream disability inclusion in all pillars of the Early Warnings For All initiative while working closely with persons with disabilities and their OPDs at the national, regional and global levels. Promote local solutions and community-driven initiatives for accessible early warnings and early action for all.