



POLICY BRIEF

# Protecting Disability Inclusive Aid: A Policy Brief for Parliamentarians

September 2026

This policy brief is intended to inform discussions on Canada's foreign aid, as part of the 2026 Budget process. The brief summarises the findings of a recent study on the impact of global aid cuts on Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPD). It makes recommendations for Canadian parliamentarians to protect disability inclusive aid in Canada's foreign assistance budget.<sup>i</sup>

## Shrinking International Aid Budgets

International development and humanitarian funding is undergoing the sharpest contraction since its existence. After reaching a record USD 223 billion in 2023, global Official Development Assistance (ODA) declined by 23.1% in real terms in 2025, with bilateral development aid falling by 26.4% and humanitarian aid by 35.8%. Major donor countries, including Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and France, have simultaneously reduced their ODA budgets, while donors increasingly shift towards geopolitical priorities, loans and private investment.

These reductions are occurring at a time of growing inequalities and humanitarian crises: estimated humanitarian needs doubled between 2015 and 2025. The reductions are likely to worsen existing systemic exclusion from healthcare, education, employment, social protection and humanitarian assistance that persons with disabilities face daily in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) and crisis affected countries.



## Disability Inclusive Aid

Approximately 1.3 billion people are persons with disabilities worldwide with nearly 80% living in LMICs, where international aid remains a critical source of support for disability inclusion. Yet disability inclusion continues to receive only a marginal share of aid: in 2023, disability-specific interventions accounted for only 0.1% of allocable ODA, while around 40% of aid remained entirely unmarked for disability inclusion.

Canada adopted the OEDC disability marker and in fiscal year 2023-24, projects worth \$203.53 million targeted disability issues as a significant policy marker. Based on this, Canada is spending roughly 2% of its overall aid budget on disability inclusive projects. There is limited information on whether the Government has a financial or policy objective for disability inclusive aid, what proportion of aid will continue to be dedicated to disability, or how much funding reaches organizations of persons with disabilities.

## The Impact of Aid Cuts on Disability Inclusion

Against this backdrop, Humanity and Inclusion surveyed 177 Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) across countries that receive significant international funding, in all continents in April 2026. Their feedback exposes a sector in severe crisis and worsened human suffering due to international aid reductions.

### Key findings

- 82% of OPDs report a high or very high **negative impact** on the well-being of persons with disabilities in their communities, directly linked to aid budget reductions.
- 79% of OPDs have faced severe or very severe funding cuts that have **affected their operational ability** in the past 18 months.
- 72% have **canceled or suspended** at least one programme or service.
- 43% describe their capacity to sustain their mission as weak or very weak, with 14% at **risk of permanent closure** if trends continue.

The crisis is driven by simultaneous reductions of funding from bilateral and multilateral donors, INGOs, and foundations, creating a cumulative “cascade effect”. This led to severe programme interruptions, weakened capacity, and reduced staff and expertise, despite OPDs being the primary providers of assistance, advocacy, and community-based support to advance disability rights and inclusion.

*“In contexts like Palestine, where persons with disabilities already face multiple layers of vulnerability, reduced funding translates into fewer rehabilitation services, limited access to assistive devices, and*



*decreased psychosocial and protection support. For many, our organisation is not an optional service provider, but their only lifeline.” – A local OPD in Palestine.*

The data indicate a significant deterioration in the well-being of persons with disabilities due to their severely limited access to essential services. There have been significant disruptions to services and support for economic inclusion and employment, assistive technology and rehabilitation, healthcare, education, support for accessibility and adaptation, food and humanitarian assistance. Access to services dedicated to women and girls, education, care services and support for independent living has also deteriorated for persons with disabilities.

This evidence suggests that the greatest negative impact of funding contractions is borne by those already marginalised, deepening their exclusion from essential services such as education, healthcare, livelihoods, and social participation.

Cuts to ODA are not just a budgetary adjustment; they are leading to a human rights crisis. Foreign policy decisions to reduce aid are actively cutting financial lifelines and dismantling the only safety net for millions of people around the world. Without immediate action, years of progress on human rights will be reversed and the structural collapse of disability representation and disability-inclusive services will become an irreversible reality. Urgent action is required from governments and donors to protect disability-inclusive funding, strengthen direct support to OPDs, and prevent aid reductions from deepening exclusion and inequality for persons with disabilities.

*“Cuts in international aid deepen the exclusion of persons with disabilities by paralysing essential autonomy programs and technical services that the State does not cover. This lack of financing makes us socially invisible and condemns us to greater dependence, violating our fundamental right to a dignified and productive life.” – A national self-advocacy OPD in the Dominican Republic*

## **Canada’s Support for Disability Inclusion**

Canada has demonstrated global leadership in advancing inclusive development and upholding the rights of people with disabilities. By ratifying the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD), Canada has committed to promoting the inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities across all aspects of society.



Last year, the Government of Canada announced a reduction of Canada's international assistance by \$2.7 million over four years, including decreased development funding for global health.

Protecting disability inclusion does not mean creating a separate development agenda, or even more funding that currently allocated. It means ensuring that Canada's international assistance continues to reach people with disabilities, despite funding cuts. The 2026 Budget is an opportunity to ensure Canada's commitment to effective and inclusive humanitarian and development continues to serve our national and global interests in inclusion, stability and security.

*“Most importantly, we urge you to recognise that cutting support to persons with disabilities is not a neutral decision. It has disproportionate and often irreversible impacts. Inclusive humanitarian action is not only a matter of equity. It is a matter of dignity, protection, and human rights.” – A local association of parents with children with disabilities in Malawi*

Disability is both a cross-cutting issue and a stand-alone sector. The most effective approach to disability inclusion is a “twin track approach”: similar to Global Affairs Canada's gender sensitive programming, it combines mainstreaming across all sectors and targeted, disability-specific investments supported by dedicated funds.

Budget 2026 should protect the proportion of aid for disability inclusion and establish a dedicated, publicly reported funding envelope for disability inclusive international assistance and humanitarian action. The Government should also commit to mainstreaming disability inclusion inside Global Affairs Canada, supporting training for staff, the consistent use of the disability marker and the collection of disaggregated data to understand cross-cutting vulnerabilities such as age, gender and disability.

Concern about the impact of potential aid cuts on disability-inclusive assistance is reflected in public interests: more than 4,300 Canadians have signed Humanity & Inclusion Canada's recent petition calling on the Government of Canada to protect disability-inclusive international assistance.

## Recommendations to Parliamentarians

As Canada reviews its international assistance priorities, parliamentarians have a critical role to play in ensuring that budget decisions do not erode progress on disability inclusion.



## **To protect disability inclusive aid, Canadian Parliamentarians should:**

### **1. Show support for maintaining Canada's international aid budget**

- Publicly oppose further cuts to Canada's international assistance budget. As crises and conflicts intensify, further cuts would put more lives at risk and undermine the systems and services communities depend on.

### **2. Call for the protection of disability inclusive funding**

- Publicly call for the protection of funding for disability inclusion and OPDs within Canada international assistance and ensure that cuts do not disproportionately impact disability inclusion in development and humanitarian programming.

### **3. Demonstrate support for disability inclusion as a cross-cutting issue in Global Affairs Canada's programming**

- Ask about how disability inclusion is being integrated across all international assistance priorities, including health, education, gender equality, economic development, climate action, humanitarian response, and peace and security. Demonstrate support for training for staff, the consistent use of the disability marker and the collection of disaggregated data to understand cross-cutting vulnerabilities.

### **4. Ask for more transparent reporting on disability inclusive aid**

- Ask about the impact of aid cuts on disability inclusive international assistance and humanitarian action. Request information about how the Government is working to ensure persons with disabilities are not excluded from assistance or disproportionately impacted by budget cuts.

### **5. Call for the participation of Persons with Disabilities in programme design**

- Publically call for the meaningful involvement of persons with disabilities, locally-led initiatives and OPDs in programme design, implementation and funding decisions.

*“We ask that funding for disability inclusion is protected and not reduced. Persons with disabilities must be included in all decisions, and services should continue, especially for those in rural areas and vulnerable groups.” – A national OPD in Samoa*



## About Humanity & Inclusion Canada

Humanity & Inclusion (HI) is an independent international solidarity organisation that has been working for 40 years in situations of poverty and exclusion, conflict and dis

Working alongside people with disabilities and the vulnerable, HI acts and advocates to meet their basic needs and improve their living conditions. HI is committed to promoting respect for their dignity and fundamental rights. Since its creation in 1982, HI has worked to advance the rights, dignity, and inclusion of people with disabilities and vulnerable populations affected by poverty, conflict, exclusion, and disaster, across more than 60 countries. HI has been present in Canada since 2003.

HI is one of the six founding organisations of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), co-winner of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize and winner of the 2011 Conrad N. Hilton Award.

<sup>i</sup> For more information, see Humanity & Inclusion, 2026, “Funding cuts turn existing inequalities into permanent exclusion: Evidence from organisations of persons with disabilities on the human and organisational impacts of cuts to international aid”, available at: [https://www.hi-canada.org/sn\\_uploads/document/factsheet\\_aid\\_cuts\\_impacts\\_on\\_disability\\_inclusion\\_1.pdf](https://www.hi-canada.org/sn_uploads/document/factsheet_aid_cuts_impacts_on_disability_inclusion_1.pdf)

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