



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

IDA-UNHCR Strategic Collaboration in 2021: Achievements, Challenges, and Way-Forward

This report provides a summary of the activities jointly organized in 2021 by the International Disability Alliance (IDA), and the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in order to fulfill goals stipulated in their 2020 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Year 2021 was the first year of the two organizations' strategic collaboration with lots of impressive achievements and many precious lessons learned. The summary compiles activities conducted under each of the four main areas of collaboration enumerated in the MOU as well as an overview of the identified gaps under each area and some ideas on how to address them in 2022 and beyond.

Mutual Capacity Building

The main goal in building capacity in 2021 was to inform IDA members and UNHCR operations about the Memorandum of Understanding, its objectives and how to contribute to its implementation. For this purpose, the two organizations developed a [short document](#) in plain language summarizing the principles of the collaboration, as well as areas of mutual interest. This document is also published in Arabic, French, Spanish, and International Sign in a webpage dedicated to their collaboration: [Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons with Disabilities | International Disability Alliance](#).

As a next step, IDA and UNHCR organized six webinars at regional level to introduce the MOU and facilitate exchanges between regional and national IDA members and UNHCR regional and country operations. During these webinars, participants exchanged information on challenges faced by displaced and stateless persons with disabilities as well as promising practices in each region. Registered participants included representatives from 41 regional and national organizations of persons with disabilities and 57 UNHCR national and regional offices.

Based on the exchanges in the regional webinars, forcibly displaced and Stateless persons with disabilities faced four main challenges:

- Invisibility: very low identification rates of persons with disabilities in refugee registration data;
- Under-representation: limited inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities among refugee-led organizations;
- Barriers in accessing services including cash-based interventions; and
- Experiencing violence and abuse without equal access to prevention and protection services.

Promising practices included partnerships with regional organizations of persons with disabilities (e.g. in the Americas); the development of [accessible information and communication materials](#) on humanitarian action for persons with disabilities and/or prevention of COVID-19, gender-based violence and other

[protection concerns](#); and the development of [toolkits](#) and [reports](#) on the rights of persons with disabilities in forced displacement.

A significant achievement in 2021 was the finalization of [UNHCR Facilitator's Guide](#) on Strengthening Protection of Persons with Disabilities in Forced Displacement. Developed by UNHCR in consultation with persons with disabilities, this guidance includes practical tips and detailed guidance to ensure disability inclusion in programming and data collection efforts, and accessibility of trainings. UNHCR and IDA conducted joint roll-out webinars to introduce this guidance and the integration of the [Washington Group Questions on Disability](#) into UNHCR's registration system. However, the Facilitator's Guide is yet to be widely utilized in UNHCR trainings and operations. To address these gaps, IDA and UNHCR plan to further support rollout of the Guide in a few trainings for UNHCR country operations as well as producing video-tutorials to introduce the Guide and its function.

Intersectionality and participation of under-represented groups of persons with disabilities is a key priority in IDA-UNHCR strategic collaboration. For this purpose, under-represented groups of persons with disabilities have been consistently encouraged to join and contribute in capacity-building activities. Furthermore, parties organized a specific session for the IDA Youth Caucus to discuss equal protection and inclusion of youth with disabilities in situations of risk and humanitarian emergency with particular focus on forced displacement and statelessness. In this session, young refugees and internally displaced persons with disabilities also shared their experience advocating for inclusion and participation. Parties also supported a specific meeting with members of the World Federation of the Deaf which included an introduction of IDA-UNHCR strategic collaboration.

Due to strong interest highlighted through three sensitization webinars in Africa, a [workshop](#) was organized for representatives from Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) from 23 countries. In this workshop, participants strengthened their knowledge on forced displacement, statelessness and UNHCR's mandate and had the opportunity of sharing their experiences and interests in further engaging in these areas in 2022 through questionnaire available in French and English.

Furthermore, UNHCR staff of Iraq country office also managed to observe the national [Bridge CRPD/SDGs training](#), an eight-day-long intense inclusive training for persons with disabilities to familiarize them with rules and principles enshrined in UN CRPD as well as Sustainable Development Goals, and how to use them in national and international advocacy. During the training, IDA and UNHCR focal points also facilitated a specific session for Bridge participants on ensuring equal protection and enhanced participation of persons with disabilities in responding to situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies with particular focus on forced displacement and statelessness.

Humanitarian Coordination

IDA and UNHCR aim to enhance inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in the work of the Global Protection Cluster (GPC) as well as the Global Refugee Forum. In 2021, a focal point on disability inclusion from Humanity and Inclusion was seconded to the Global Protection Cluster. Coordination in 2022 will focus in promoting the meaningful participation of organizations of persons with disabilities in the framework of this collaboration.

The parties also actively collaborated to promote the protection and inclusion of forcibly displaced and stateless persons with disabilities within the events related to High-Level Officials Meeting. Influencing the upcoming Global Refugee Forum through active engagement of persons with disabilities will remain

a major priority for their collaboration. In this regard, both organizations will collaborate in 2022 to identify and support the meaningful participation of refugees with disabilities into the work of refugee-led organizations and organizations of persons with disabilities.

Advocacy and CRPD Monitoring

As a response to growing concerns about the impact of climate change including enhanced forced displacement, in collaboration with the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, the parties published a [Factsheet](#) on Disability, Displacement and Climate Change. This factsheet is a useful advocacy tool and has been promoted in a number of key events including the [Humanitarian Networks and Partnership Week 2021](#), and the 14th Conference of States Parties to the CRPD convention.

Approaching the second [Global Disability Summit February 2022](#), IDA and UNHCR joined efforts to advocate for commitments to enhance the protection and participation of forcibly displaced and stateless persons with disabilities. As active members of the [Reference Group on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action \(DRG\)](#), both parties supported the development and promotion of a [Call for Action](#) on Disability-Inclusive Humanitarian Commitments. Endorsed by more than 60 entities so far, the Call for Action invites all partners to commit to “... Ensure a disability inclusive approach to mixed movements of people, including improving access to national service systems for refugees, internally displaced persons, and migrants; and Make asylum procedures and durable solutions inclusive for persons with disabilities, including by reinforcing the protection of persons with disabilities within asylum systems and resettlement submissions, and by determining (safe and dignified) conditions for return”.

Another area of mutual interest in advocacy is to enhance the quantity and quality of reference to human rights of forcibly displaced persons with disabilities in the work of the UN human rights treaty bodies, in particular the CRPD Committee. Due to continuation of COVID-19 pandemic, the activities of the UN CRPD committee have been very limited in 2021. The parties aimed to develop a [practical guidance](#) for UNHCR country teams to help them prepare submissions for the CRPD Committee documenting the violations of CRPD against Forcibly displaced and stateless persons with disabilities. Throughout the development of this guidance, it was identified an area for further work in 2022: raising awareness and strengthening the linkages between the CRPD and the 1951 Refugee Convention. A technical discussion and a background paper will be developed in 2022 to facilitate the development of more technical resources in the coming years.

Implementation of the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy

Areas for collaboration identified for further development in 2022 include the engagement of organizations of persons with disabilities in discussions on strengthening disability inclusion Human Resources, in addition to providing training to the Global Learning and Development Centre.

Challenges, lessons learnt and way forward

Overall, IDA-UNHCR collaboration faced two principal challenges in 2021 which influenced all plans and activities undertaken throughout the year. First, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to impose serious restrictions at all levels. The uncertainty and continuous changes hindered planning in person meetings and reduced availability and flexibility of both agencies as well as their members and partners to engage as actively as they wished.

Secondly, due to novelty of the collaboration in some regions and other sensitivities, coordination of each activity has not been equally smooth. This caused failure to organize some regional activities as well as advancing in some other areas including engagement with UN human rights mechanisms.

To summarize lessons learnt, the parties concluded that:

1. More in-depth and tailored capacity-building is needed for IDA members and UNHCR staff to ensure meaningful and sustained transformation in supporting forcibly displaced and stateless persons with disabilities. For this purpose, mutual capacity-building will remain a top priority in IDA-UNHCR collaboration.
2. Notwithstanding the key role of organizations of persons with disabilities in advocacy and capacity-building, more active involvement of forcibly displaced and stateless persons with disabilities will lead to a fundamental change. In particular, supporting their participation in Refugee-Led Organizations may facilitate addressing many of the identified challenges. To address this gap, IDA and UNHCR are planning to identify displaced and stateless persons with disabilities willing to engage, and support them with capacity-building, facilitated connections, and advocacy opportunities.
3. Despite considerable development in clarifying synergies between the UN CRPD and Refugee Law, the necessity to have more clear guidance in this regard is evident. To fill this gap, IDA and UNHCR as first step are planning to initiate some studies and expert conversations to discuss how to interpret the refugee law in light of norms and principles underlying CRPD.

These three areas of collaboration will be the focus of the second year of the collaboration in 2022.