



IDA-UNHCR Strategic Collaboration in 2022: Key Steps Towards Inclusion and Participation

This report provides a summary of the activities jointly organized in 2022 by the International Disability Alliance (IDA), and the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to progress in the objectives outlined in their [2020 Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MOU).

During the second year of their strategic collaboration, guided by [2021 achievements and lessons learnt](#), IDA and UNHCR focused their efforts on three main areas:

- Continuing mutual capacity-building for IDA members and UNHCR staff;
- Enhanced involvement of forcibly displaced and stateless persons with disabilities in global, regional and national response to displacement and statelessness; and
- Clarifying and strengthening synergies between the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Refugee Law and asylum procedures.

1. Mutual Capacity Building

Roll out of UNHCR Facilitators' Guide

Throughout 2022, IDA and UNHCR continued their collaboration in mutual capacity-building in different ways. One area of priority was the roll-out of [UNHCR Facilitator's Guide on Strengthening Protection of Persons with Disabilities in Forced Displacement](#). Developed by UNHCR in collaboration with IDA in 2021, this guidance includes practical tips and detailed guidance to ensure disability inclusion in programming and data collection efforts, and accessibility of trainings, among other.

To support the use of the Facilitator's Guide, IDA and UNHCR jointly produced 11 accessible tutorial videos on the materials and ensuring accessibility of trainings. Three [OPD fellows](#), engaged under the Disability Reference Group, with diverse disabilities from Americas, Asia and Eastern Africa participated in the production of the videos. All videos and training materials can be downloaded in this [webpage](#), and are also [available in French](#).

At regional level, a training of trainers was conducted in Jordan in collaboration with the UNHCR Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regional bureau for 27 UNHCR colleagues and partners representing 14 country operations. The training consisted of a remote self-learning phase and an in-person workshop in Amman. The week-long workshop phase was co-facilitated by a team of UNHCR staff and an IDA senior training officer. During the training, participants developed in-depth understanding about the concepts of

disability, accessibility and reasonable accommodation, and explored barriers faced by forcibly displaced persons with disabilities and ways to address them.

At country level, the roll-out of the Facilitator's guide in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was one of the great examples of the collaboration between national Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and the UNHCR country team in DRC, with the support from IDA and UNHCR headquarters. During the capacity building workshop in Kinshasa, three Congolese advocates with disabilities representing the Congolese Federation of Persons with Disabilities, Dameda Foundation and Enabling the Disabled Goma, co-facilitated the training to 14 UNHCR colleagues from the operation. The learning initiative also included a preparatory webinar attended by 50 representatives of OPDs in DRC to introduce the mandate of UNHCR and the areas of the IDA-UNHCR collaboration as well as activities in the region and in DRC. The OPD participants also had the opportunity to share their experience whether as displaced persons or OPDs working to support displaced populations.

Engaging with DRG Fellows

IDA and UNHCR prioritized providing technical support as well as facilitating contribution opportunities for [DRG Fellows](#). Recruited under USAID-funded project by the Reference Group on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action (DRG), the fellows bring together different experiences from different parts of the world, with the common objective of promoting the rights of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action. The eight fellows come from a wide variety of regions (East Asia, Pacific, South America, Middle East, East, West and Central Africa), and represent different disability constituencies. Six out of the eight are men with disabilities and two of them are women.

IDA and UNHCR jointly organized three capacity-development webinars for the fellows to enhance their knowledge and understanding of UNHCR's mandate and how they can contribute to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in situations of forced displacement or statelessness. Furthermore, three of the fellows engaged in recording tutorial videos to support the use of [UNHCR's Facilitators Guide](#) as mentioned above, and one facilitated training for the staff of UNHCR's Global Learning and Development Center. The fellows also played a significant role mobilizing forcibly displaced persons with disabilities to participate in IDA-UNHCR webinar series November-December 2022 (see below under the section on meaningful participation), and actively engaged in those webinars through sharing their experiences and considerations. As part of this cross-collaboration, UNHCR Protection staff in HQ co-facilitated trainings for OPDs organized by the DRG fellows in Spanish and French speaking countries.

Outside the UNHCR-IDA collaboration but in the framework of IDA-IDDC [Bridge initiative](#), three in-depth trainings are being planned for 2023 for OPDs and humanitarian actors jointly and mutually develop their capacity and knowledge. One of the planned trainings is to focus on conflict and displacement. To prepare for these trainings, a workshop was organized in November 2022 in Geneva adopting the objectives and outline. IDA and UNHCR contributed significantly in the workshop to ensure proper coverage of forced displacement and refugee response in the outline of the training, and plan to continue integrating these topics through developing training material and joining the facilitators' team.

Training for the Global Learning and Development Center

One main objective of IDA-UNHCR collaboration in area of capacity-building is to enhance disability-inclusive training and facilitation skills among the UNHCR's Global Learning and Development Center's staff. For this purpose, two dedicated training sessions were organized with IDA training officers (a woman

with a psychosocial disability from South Asia, a deaf woman from East Asia and two blind men from North Africa) and one of the DRG fellows as facilitators.

The first session with 53 participants focused on understanding disability from right-based approach perspective, while the second session with 48 participants addressed the concepts of accessibility and reasonable accommodation, and how to ensure accessible trainings and capacity building initiatives for all staff and partners.

Priorities for 2023

In 2023, IDA and UNHCR will continue with similar activities in the area of capacity-building. Mutual participation in capacity building activities targeting both UNHCR colleagues and partners as well as OPDs and the disability movement will include organizing at least two global online learning programs and at least two in-person trainings for UNHCR staff in two operations, providing technical support and promoting UNHCR country engagement in DRG-led trainings for OPDs and humanitarian actors.

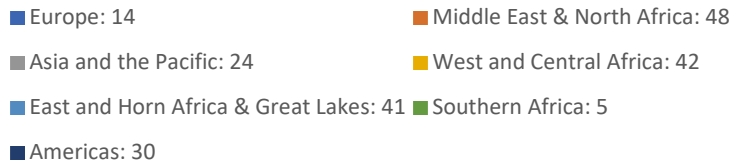
2. Enhanced involvement of displaced and stateless persons with disabilities

One of the major gaps identified by IDA and UNHCR in 2022 was the limited engagement of forcibly displaced and stateless persons with disabilities in both OPDs and refugee-lead organizations. To address this gap, partners took the initiative of bringing together forcibly displaced and stateless persons with disabilities with the objective of start shaping an informal network. As of first steps, displaced and stateless persons with disabilities were identified through a survey launched to support the mandate of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Rights of Persons with disabilities which was widely circulated within IDA networks. Those identified through this channel, as well as others including OPDs interested to facilitate and support engagement of forcibly displaced persons with disabilities, were gathered for an initial informal exchange in September. During this first gathering, participants were briefed about the scope and mandate of UNHCR, and areas of collaboration between IDA and UNHCR. The participants then had opportunities to share challenges they have faced as displaced and stateless people with disabilities, or as OPDs working to support these groups.

Based on the input from participants in the initial meeting, as well as issues raised in earlier webinars, IDA and UNHCR organized a series of five informative webinars in the course of November and December with simultaneous interpretation to Arabic, French and Spanish, and accessible via captioning and International Sign Interpretation. Detailed summary reports are available [here](#) and the recordings of the webinars [here](#).

The webinars gathered together 204 participants from all seven regions, including 118 women, 84 men and 2 participants preferring not to say. More than half of the participants were participants with disabilities: 53 % of women and 75 % of men were participants with disabilities. Geographically the webinars were mostly attended by participants from Middle East and North Africa (48 participants), West and Central Africa (42 participants) and East Horn Africa and the Great Lakes (41 participants).

REGIONAL REPRESENTATION IN THE WEBINARS



Participants' Age and Gender Distribution



The webinar series covered the following themes:

Webinar 1 - Engagement with human rights mechanisms for disability inclusion in response to displacement and statelessness. During the webinar, Juan Ignacio Perez Bello, Human Rights Advisor at IDA, introduced how OPD could contribute in monitoring the implementation Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and on engaging with the CRPD Committee. Peter Swinarski, Legal Officer at UNHCR, highlighted the issues UNHCR has been addressing to the CRPD Committee and collaboration with other human rights mechanisms to ensure protection of persons with disabilities in relation to UNHCR's mandate. The discussion touched upon topics such as frameworks and human rights instruments that can be utilized to ensure compliance of national asylum procedures and systems with the CRPD.

Webinar 2 - Towards the 2nd Global Refugee Forum. With the second [Global Refugee Forum \(GRF\) happening in 2023](#), IDA and UNHCR dedicated the 2nd webinar to inform forcibly displaced persons with disabilities and OPDs supporting them on how to engage with the GRF, based on [previous experiences of Organizations of Persons with Disabilities](#) participating in the 2019 first GRF. Juan Ángel de Gouveia, President at the Latin American Network of Non-Governmental Organizations of Persons with Disabilities

and their Families (RIADIS), shared about his experience in attending the GRF in 2019 and on how priorities for disability rights have evolved for 2023. Machtelt de Vriese, Senior Community-Based Protection Officer at UNHCR, presented the background and key objectives of the [Global Compact on Refugees](#) and Niklas Saxen, Senior Humanitarian Adviser at Ministry of Foreign Affairs Finland, reflected on the pledging component.

Webinar 3 - Understanding the protection mandate of UNHCR and connections for persons with disabilities. The webinar discussed the key concepts on refugee law, refugee status determination and statelessness as well as how those are relevant to persons with disabilities in situations of forced displacement and statelessness.

Webinar 4 - Gender-Based Violence and Forcibly Displaced Women with Disabilities. The webinar highlighted the disproportionate impact of gender-based violence (GBV) on women and girls with disabilities, and explored promising practices in GBV prevention and response, building on advocacy efforts made during the 16 Days of Activism. The webinar shared examples and experiences on operational practices across Kenya, Syria and the Ukraine Response in Europe as well as from the South America.

Webinar 5 - Year-End Consultation with OPDs and refugees and stateless persons with disabilities. The objective of this webinar was identifying and shaping key asks for UNHCR and IDA collaboration in 2023, including towards the second Global Refugee Forum in December. The registration form used for this webinar included a dedicated space to share three key asks for UNHCR and IDA joint activities in 2023.

Key asks shared by refugees and stateless persons and representatives of organizations of persons with disabilities throughout this consultative process were summarized in four main areas that will guide IDA-UNHCR's collaboration in 2023.

1. **Ensuring equality and non-discrimination in accessing services and self-reliance opportunities for refugee with disabilities.** Recommendations under this area included monitoring access to mainstream services, identifying barriers to access those services, and providing affirmative measures to ensure equal access, including by improving the accessibility of services and the provision of reasonable adjustments to address remaining barriers to access.
2. **Addressing the impact of protection concerns faced by forcibly displaced and stateless women and girls with disabilities.** Key issues highlighted under this area included ensuring the wellbeing of women and girls who are refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons with disabilities by ensuring their equal access to prevention and response mechanisms, and by empowerment opportunities like employment and gender equality efforts.
3. **Ensuring equal access to international protection, including asylum procedures, for refugees and asylum seekers with disabilities.** Specific requests included strengthen the capacity of asylum staff on understanding a rights-based approach to disability, ensuring equal access to procedures by providing reasonable adjustments and avoiding additional barriers, raising awareness on the extent to which the continuous violation or denial of rights to persons with disabilities may amount to persecution, and addressing the negative interaction between refugee and disability provisions in host countries.
4. **Strengthening the capacities and meaningful participation of organisations of persons with disabilities and refugees with disabilities.** Specific asks included building the capacity of OPD,

refugees and stateless persons with disabilities through access to training opportunities, grassroots level sensitization, financial resources and direct program implementation opportunities.

3. Clarifying the connections between the UN CRPD and refugee law

Despite disability rights being increasingly considered in the humanitarian sector and with regards to international refugee law, the need to further understand the connections between the UN CRPD and international refugee law is urgent. To support shaping this discussion, IDA and UNHCR commissioned a background paper exploring the intersection of international refugee law and the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD). The paper reviews the application of CRPD provisions to asylum procedures for persons with disabilities, disability as an element in interpreting and applying the refugee definition under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951 Refugee Convention), and protections provided under the CRPD for asylum-seekers and refugees with disabilities.

The development of this background paper was the first step towards strengthening the intersection of disability rights and refugee law. IDA and UNHCR will continue their collaboration enhancing knowledge and expertise in this regard. Activities in 2023 will include bringing the theme forward through contributions to the CRPD Committee in their work on developing the upcoming General Comment on Article 11 of the CRPD Convention.

4. Way forward in 2023

Based on the outcomes of the collaboration in 2022 and the results of consultations with refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons with disabilities and OPDs, IDA and UNHCR will prioritize the following areas of work in 2023:

- Continued **capacity-building**, with an emphasis on regional and national level capacity-building for UNHCR staff, active involvement in mutual capacity-sharing of OPDs and humanitarian actors, and technical contributions to capacity building for OPDs.

The model of joint and mutual capacity-building initiatives where persons with disabilities and OPD representatives share their knowledge and expertise on disability-inclusion, accessibility and rights-based approach on one side, and UNHCR staff share information and technical knowledge about mandate and ways of operation of the organizations as well as rules governing response to forced displacement and statelessness, has been proved successful and widely welcome throughout the first 2 years of collaboration. In 2023, this model will be adopted in regional and national trainings for UNHCR staff and trainings for OPDs and other stakeholders.

For the first time, this model of joint and mutual capacity-development will also be adapted to conduct accessibility and safety audits by OPDs in two pilot countries. This will allow UNHCR country teams to receive first-hand feedback from OPDs about their measures to ensure accessibility and disability inclusion, at the same time providing OPDs with the opportunity to face realities of UNHCR's work on the ground and use their expertise in practice to promote disability-inclusion. This process will be documented via accessible videos which would be inspiring and guiding for other countries in coming years.

- **Meaningful participation** of refugees with disabilities in the 2nd Global Refugee Forum, and advocating for enhanced quality disability-inclusive and disability-focused pledges.

2023 is marked with the second Global Refugee Forum where governments, refugees, UNHCR teams and other stakeholders will come together to take stock on their progress in realizing pledges made

in the first GRF, and strategize on how to address existing barriers faced by refugees around the world. IDA and UNHCR have already started their activities to ensure a more disability-inclusive GRF: IDA and one of its members, the Latin American Network of Organizations of Persons with Disabilities and Their Families have joined the NGO Reference Group, and IDA is an active member of the group of friends on [Age, Gender, and Diversity Inclusive Pledges](#). IDA and UNHCR have also organized a webinar for forcibly displaced persons with disabilities and OPDs on ways to get more involved in the second GRF, and are planning to organize additional events throughout 2023.

For 2023, IDA and UNHCR will also prioritize the meaningful participation of refugees with disabilities in the GRF through supporting the attendance of refugees with disabilities in person at key events.

- Active involvement and facilitating participation of forcibly displaced persons with disabilities in developing **CRPD Committee General Comment on Article 11**. That will also enhance synergies of the UN CRPD and international refugee law.

IDA and UNHCR will follow up the findings of the discussion paper developed in 2022 on the intersection of disability rights and refugee law, leveraging the opportunity of the CRPD Committee developing a General Comment on Article 11 of the CRPD Convention regarding situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies. For this purpose, IDA and UNHCR will facilitate the involvement of members of the informal network of forcibly displaced persons with disabilities and supporting OPDs in different opportunities engaging with the Committee including participation in regional consultations, and will be invited for specific consultations outcome of which will be reflected on submissions and input to the General Comment.

Regular updates on the progress of these initiatives will be regularly shared in webinars organized by IDA and UNHCR.