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Bridging the Gap II

Disability inclusion in development
cooperation – The European way forward

Brussels, 5 December 2019

European Economic and Social Committee

Concept Note





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1. Introduction – Disability mainstreaming

The rights of persons with disabilities are protected and promoted by the 2006 United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The Convention has served as the major catalyst in the global movement in shifting the view on persons with disabilities as objects of charity, medical treatment and subjects of social assistance towards the human rights approach recognising them as full and equal members of society. It is also the only UN human rights instrument with an explicit development dimension: article 32 of the CRPD acknowledges the importance of international cooperation in support of national efforts for its implementation and promotes measures to ensure that development cooperation is inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities.

Among its objectives, **Bridging the Gap II** (BtG-II) aims to contribute to the mainstreaming of the disability component in international development cooperation. BtG-II supports the practical implementation of the human rights-based approach and the consideration of disability as a cross-cutting issue of utmost importance in all projects, programmes and initiative of cooperation, instead of being a standing-alone pillar. This approach is key to ensure the full implementation of the CRPD and of the SDGs' principle of "leaving no one behind". Article 32 of the CRPD requires the States Parties to undertake "appropriate and effective measures" for the promotion and support of the objectives of the Convention via international cooperation, "in partnership with relevant international and regional organizations and civil society".

Leveraging on article 32's provisions, as well as on the European Union's commitment to disability mainstreaming claimed in the 2017 European Consensus on Development, **BtG-II** works to support the EU's and its member States' efforts to make their international cooperation's policies and initiatives more inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities. So far, **BtG-II** has launched and conducted three studies on disability, organised numerous trainings and seminars, and worked along with existing programme and initiatives, EU Delegations and other key international development practitioners in the five participating countries. Among the activities, it is worth highlighting:





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- Preliminary study “Inclusion of persons with disabilities in European Union development cooperation mechanisms”;
- Study on the meaningful participation of organisations of persons with disabilities in the project countries;
- Evaluation of the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the post-2016 earthquake reconstruction in Ecuador;
- Recommendations on the inclusion of migrants with disabilities;
- Organisation of 5 Disability Equality Trainings at headquarters’ level for the project partners;
- Organised a 3-language, 12-session webinar on disability and development;
- Organisations of 4 workshops on disability mainstreaming, including a first [Stakeholder seminar on disability mainstreaming in development cooperation in Brussels in April 2019](#);
- Successfully engaged in the mainstreaming of the disability component in existing initiatives of the United Nations, the EU cooperation, the Spanish, Austrian and Italian Cooperation.

Therefore, this workshop is not to be seen as a ‘one-off’ activity, rather as continuation and expansion of the mainstreaming activities listed above.

Beyond Bridging the Gap

Over the past decade, and in particular since the beginning of the transition from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a global effort to promote the mainstreaming of disability issues in international cooperation has been gaining momentum. Specific initiatives and researches have been developed, bringing to the elaboration of guidelines and toolkits on disability mainstreaming.

In 2009 Handicap International (now Humanity and Inclusion) defined disability mainstreaming as “a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of persons with disabilities an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic, and societal spheres so that persons





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with disability benefit equally”. It therefore implies that all development interventions are “planned and implemented in such a way that people with disabilities, their needs, rights and potentials are taken into account on equal terms with those of other population groups” (CBM, Disability & Development Policy, 2007).

The CRPD contains a mainstreaming clause deriving from the joint reading of articles 4 and 19, which address the duty-bearers, i.e. the States, asking for taking “into account the protection and promotion of the human rights of persons with disabilities in all policies and programmes” and ensuring “community services and facilities for the general population are available on an equal basis to persons with disabilities and are responsive to their needs” respectively.

The introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), based upon the principle of “Leaving no one behind”, has further supported the consideration of the disability dimension in development cooperation, with 11 explicit references to persons with disabilities and their inclusion, specifically in the parts related to education, growth and employment, inequality, accessibility of human settlements, as well as data collection and the monitoring of the SDGs.

Several initiatives are in place to support disability-inclusive development, most noteworthy:

- The UN Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD);
- The United Nations Disability Strategy (UN DIS)
- The two Global Summits on Disability (London 2018 and Buenos Aires 2019);
- The introduction of the OECD DAC Marker on disability;
- The launch, expansion and consolidation of the Global Action on Disability Network (GLAD);
- The IDA 2019 replenishment.

Numerous other significant initiatives have also been supported individually by national governments, development agencies, INGOs, etc.





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In addition, the EU is currently undergoing the early stages of the review process of the post-2020 European Disability Strategy, whose an entire section was dedicated to the External Action. The consolidation of the external dimension of the Disability Strategy in the next programming phase 2021-2027, in line with the provisions of art. 32 CRPD, is of paramount importance to ensure adequate funding and alignment to the Concluding Observations of the UNCRPD Committee in the next EU MFF.

2. Description of the activity

Based on the recommendations/inputs deriving from the initiatives listed under paragraph 1, BtG-II organises a new Stakeholder seminar on disability mainstreaming.

The overall objective of the seminar is **to contribute to the current debate on disability-inclusive development by reinforcing the role of the European international cooperation and the external dimension of the European Disability Strategy.**

The specific objectives of the activity are:

- To synthetically analyse the state of the art of disability mainstreaming in development cooperation;
- To present and work on the results, recommendations and lessons learned from the activities carried on by BtG and others;
- To build upon past experiences and to make proposals for future initiatives, notably in the context of the review of the EU Disability Strategy and other forthcoming initiatives;
- To impulse further initiatives and commitments for disability mainstreaming in development cooperation.

