

April 23-26th 2019

Making
it Work 

Gender and Disability
2019

Nairobi, Kenya



Still a long way to go: Inclusion of women with disabilities in African Gender-Based Violence policies

Policy review across 31 countries

Humanity & Inclusion - Making It Work Gender and Disability project

October 2024



Time for effective inclusion

This policy review aims to measure the level of inclusion of women with disabilities in national policies to address gender-based violence (GBV) in African countries. Our analysis was conducted using a measurement tool, which is presented at the end of the document.

One in five women is a woman living with a disability, yet very few policies are built to ensure and protect the rights of women with disabilities specifically. Although some policies entail inclusive measures, which deserve to be highlighted, this study sheds light on the huge lack of inclusion and equality of GBV policies.

This policy review was first carried out in 2020. At that time, inclusion, intersectionality and diversity were already at the forefront of the conversation. Although policies should be inclusive and protect those who face intersecting forms of discrimination, our study found that women with disabilities were invisible in two-thirds of GBV policies.

The updated review, published in 2024, sadly confirms that there is still a long way to go among the 31 GBV policies analysed across the African continent.

Beyond the bitter observation, this document aims to improve the inclusion of GBV policies. It gathers elements to guide policy makers on building stronger and more inclusive policies. We also hope that it will inspire women-led civil society organisations to review existing policies, because the better we assess exclusion, the more chance we have of addressing it.

The measuring tool was built thanks to the contribution of Lucky Mahenzo Mbonani and Professor Arlene S Kanter from Syracuse University, College of Law, with guidance from the Making It Work Technical Advisory Committee members.

The initial review was chiefly the work of Inès Ayyadi. Isabelle Lamaud was given the task of updating it in 2024. This work was supervised by Sophie Pecourt.

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Cover picture: Winfred Namukwaya, Executive Director, MUDIWA Uganda.
Credit Arnold Temple Visuals, Kenya, 2019.

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About the tool

Five levels of inclusion

31 gender-based violence policies have been analysed. By the end of the analysis, each policy obtained a “**score of inclusion**”. This score shows to what extent the policy is inclusive of women with disabilities based on a "scale" divided in **5 levels of inclusion**:

1. **Invisible:** No or few mentions of women with disabilities.
2. **Awareness:** Mention of women with disabilities, discrimination is seen as important to address but there are no adequate resources nor specific practices towards them.
3. **Intentional inclusion:** Women with disabilities are not only mentioned but targeted by specific practices.
4. **Strategic inclusion:** Long term, strategic measures are taken to ensure women with disabilities can enjoy their rights. Provisions for monitoring and accountability are made.
5. **Culture of inclusion:** Women's multiple identities are considered and supported and systemic processes for maintaining inclusion are enforced.

Categories of inclusion

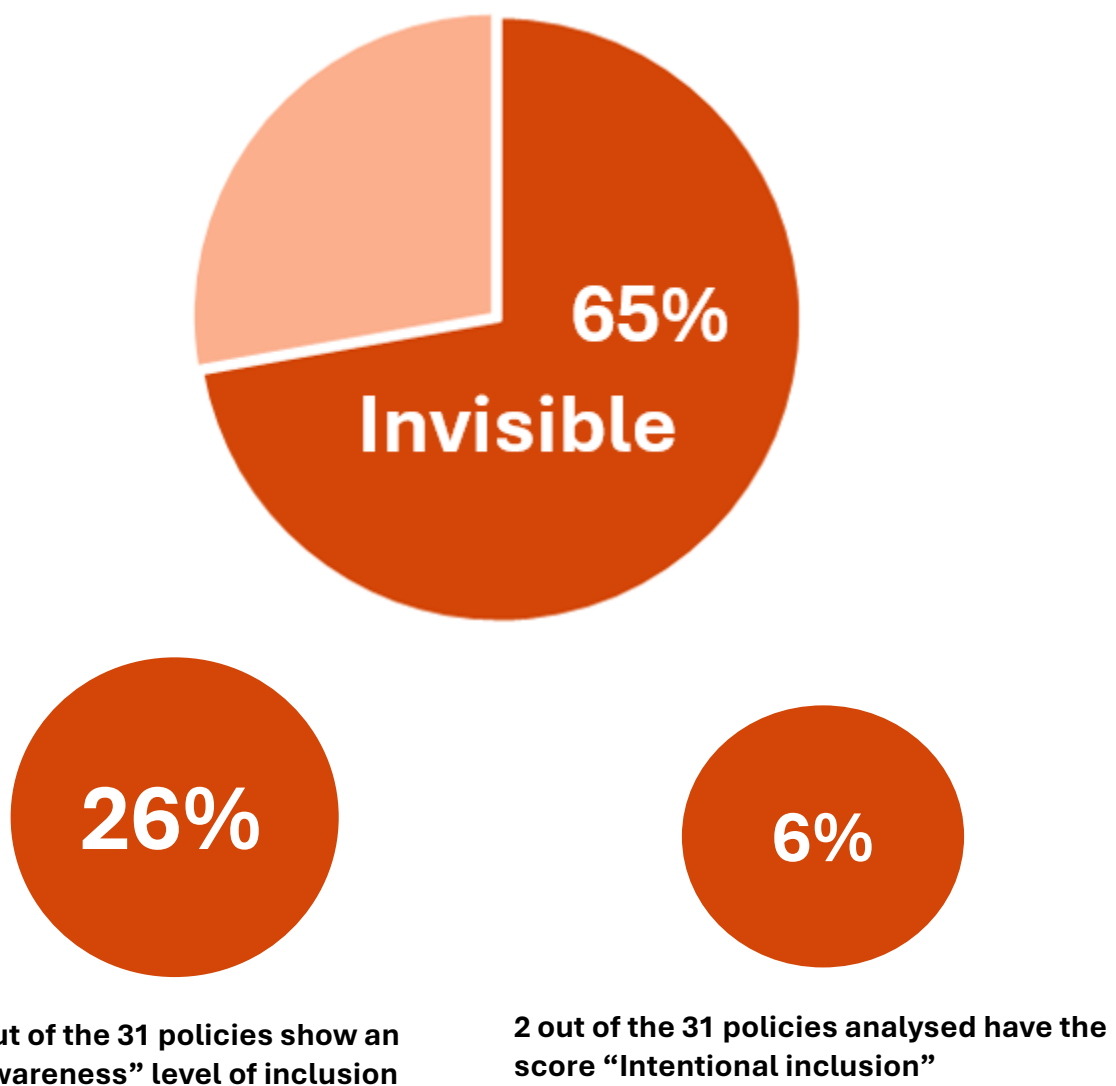
The tool was built around five categories of questions:

1. **Conceptualisation:** Questions seek to analyse whether the policy refers to women with disabilities, acknowledges their vulnerability to GBV and prioritize their needs. The policy should adopt a twin track approach: ensuring that women with disabilities have access to their basic needs in all services on an equal basis with other women, while also addressing their specific needs.
2. **Data and evidence:** Questions seek to analyse whether the policy requires data on GBV against women with disabilities and data about the accessibility of services.
3. **Accessibility and inclusive services:** Questions seek to analyse whether the policy includes the concept of accessibility to all users and specific provision for vulnerable groups including women with disabilities. The policy should provide instructions on the provision of accessible services and information. It should also ensure that service providers are trained on working with women with disabilities who are victims/survivors of GBV.
4. **Participation and coordination:** Questions seek to analyse whether the policy establishes partnerships with organizations of women with disabilities to develop, enforce and monitor the policy provisions. The policy should ensure monitoring of accessible service provision.
5. **Resource mobilization:** Questions seek to analyse whether dedicated financial resources are mobilized to prevent and respond to GBV against women with disabilities.

Key findings

Still a long way to go

Women with disabilities are **invisible** in 20 out of the 31 policies

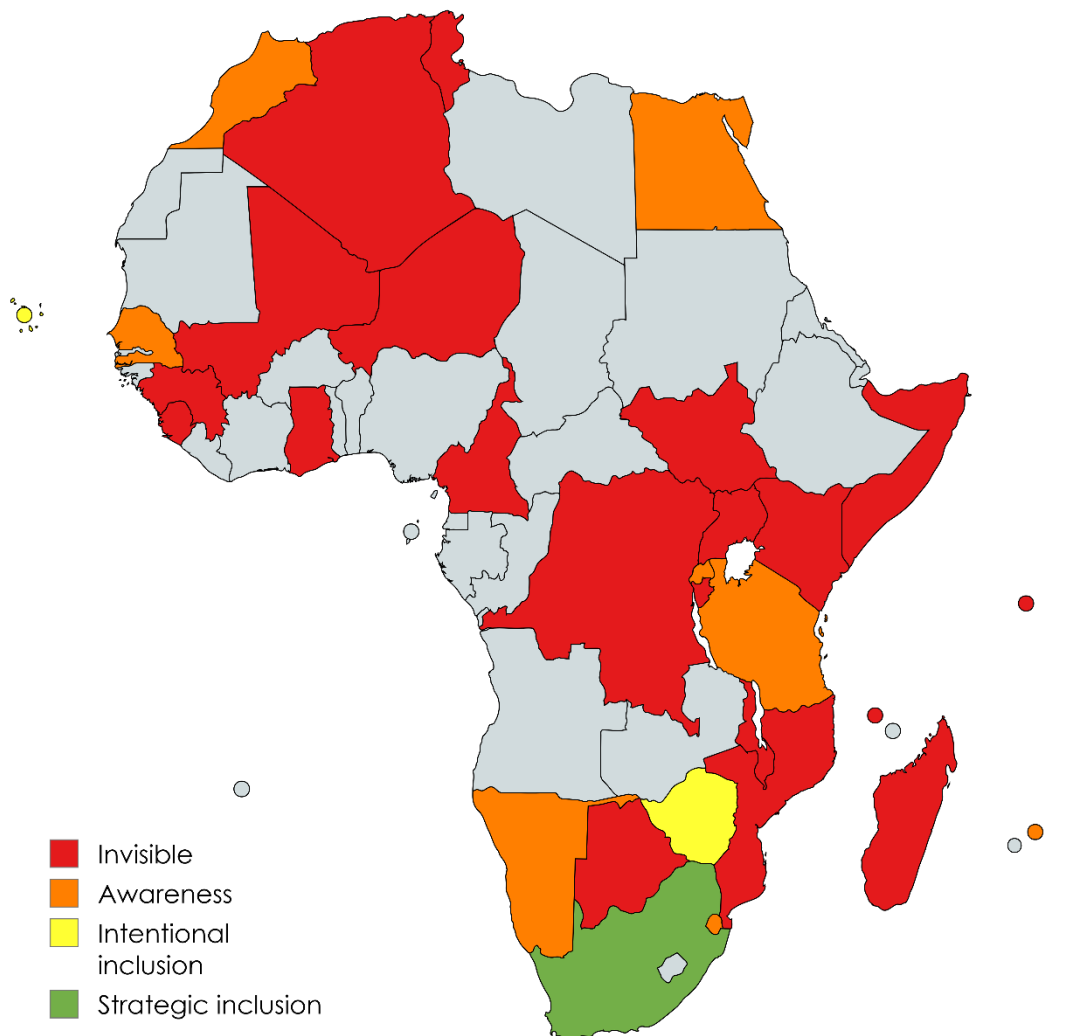


- Women with disabilities are invisible in 20 of the 31 policies (65%)
- 8 out of the 31 policies have the score “Awareness” (26%)
- 2 out of the 31 policies have the score “Intentional inclusion” (6%)

Best results

The most inclusive policies are:

- **South Africa, NATIONAL GBV AND FEMICIDE STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-2030: Strategic inclusion.**
- **Cabo Verde, NATIONAL PLAN TO COMBAT GBV (PNVBG 2015-2018): Intentional inclusion.**
- **Zimbabwe, NATIONAL PROGRAM ON GBV PREVENTION AND RESPONSE 2016-2020: Intentional inclusion.**
- **Eswatini, NATIONAL STRATEGY TO END VIOLENCE AND COSTED ACTION PLAN 2023-2027: Awareness.**



Created with mapchart.net

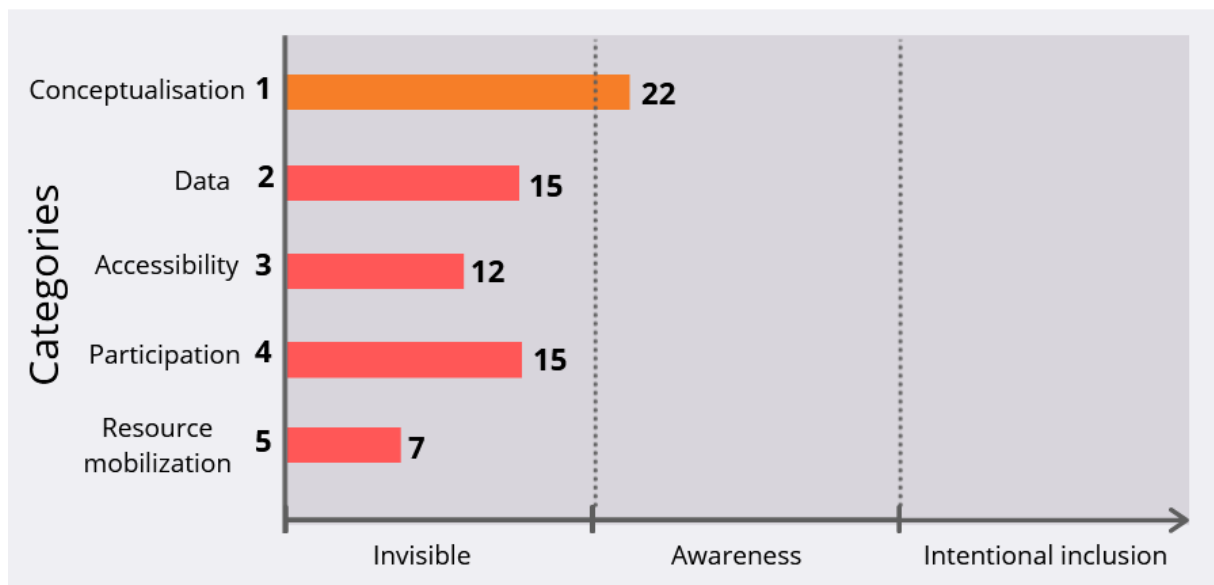
Less inclusive areas

Conceptualisation: 93% of policies do not prohibit the use of forced sterilization, forced abortion and forced contraception on women with disabilities.

Accessibility and inclusive services: 89% of policies do not ensure the training and supervision of service providers (shelter staff, social workers, medical personnel) about the rights and needs of women with disabilities and how to provide respectful care; nor the training of police, judicial officials or other law enforcement personnel on responding to women with disabilities who are victims/survivors of GBV.

Participation: 83% of policies do not engage organizations of women with disabilities in the development of GBV programs and policies.

Score by category: from theoretical to effective inclusion



We have shown that of the 31 policies analysed, women with disabilities are visible in only 11 of them. Looking at the different categories of inclusion, as shown above, it appears that most of the inclusive provisions belong to the category called conceptualisation. This category looks at whether the policy refers to women with disabilities, recognises their vulnerability to GBV and prioritises their needs.

Our study shows that even when women with disabilities are mentioned in the introduction of a policy, very little is translated into practical provisions dealing with data, accessibility, participation, or funding.

The inclusion of women with disabilities remains performative and does not translate into concrete measures.

There is an urgent need to shift from theoretical inclusion to effective inclusive policies.

There is hope

Focus on inclusive provisions

Some of the policies analysed presented a few innovative and inclusive provisions to tackle GBV. Here are a few ideas on how to conceive better policies, meaning policies that encompass the complexity and diversity of women's identities, in order to leave no woman behind.

Conceptualisation

- **Egypt** foresees that GBV affects *"in particular women and girls with disabilities who, as a result of their disabilities, are more prone to become victims of violence."*
- **Senegal** acknowledges the mental and physical harm caused by GBV: *"Victims suffer serious physical and psychological consequences."*
- **South Africa** insists on the intersecting forms of discrimination *"As such, it can be suggested that women with disabilities face multiple forms of oppression as gender, violence, and disability intersects and shapes the life experiences of a person already experiencing discrimination."*
- **Zimbabwe** reaffirms the National Disability Policy which *"calls for the prosecution of all individuals and institutions that exploit and subject persons with disability to violence."*

Data and evidence

- **Tunisia** reaffirms that *"Data relating to the victim and the perpetrator should at a minimum be distinguished by sex, age, type of violence and relationship between victim and perpetrator, geographical location, as well as other factors considered relevant, such as disability."*
- **Mauritius** assesses the accessibility of services by ensuring *"Impact assessment conducted on the services provided to [...] women with disabilities."*

Accessibility

- **Tanzania** recognizes the necessity of *"Creating and sustaining safe and accessible spaces for women and children throughout our communities" and that "efforts must be made to improve access to services for those groups that are marginalized, likely to be excluded, or face barriers to accessing services."*
- **Namibia** guarantees that *"Wherever possible the National Disability Council will also take responsibility for ensuring that information and messages generated by stakeholders are distributed to their constituent organizations. While specialized versions, such as braille and sign language remain the gold standard, the Plan encourages stakeholders to utilize simple appropriate technology (e.g. voice notes for*

visually impaired, text messages for hearing impaired) where the gold standard is not available or affordable."

Participation

- **Eswatini** acknowledges the necessity to “Strengthen relations and integration with organizations representing PWD [Persons with disabilities] across all coordination mechanisms.”
- **South Africa** commits on “*Community Dialogues held in collaboration with civil society on critical GBV areas such as [...] rights of womxn¹ living with disability.*”

Recommendations

Let's build policies that leave no woman behind!

- Ensure that the rights of women with disabilities are mainstreamed in all policies related to gender equality, GBV, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, harmful practices.
- Ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and translate it into national legislation.
- Ratify the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa, adopted in 2018 which explicitly tackles the different forms of violations that women and girls with disabilities of all age in Africa are particularly at risk of.
- Refer to regional tools such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Gender Protocol Barometer and other inclusive documents when building policies.
- Include organizations of women with disabilities in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all policies related to gender equality, GBV, SHRH, harmful practices.
- Support organizations of women with disabilities to ensure representation.
- Always consider the intersection of gender, disability and age, among other factors (socio economic status, ethnicity, poverty, migration status, etc.) in policy-making.
- Establish governance bodies which include ministries, civil society and women with disabilities to monitor the implementation of national policies and strategies.

¹ The term « womxn » is used as a word welcoming trans and non-binary individuals, as well as each person who identifies as a woman regardless of assigned sex at birth.

Scoring tool

Conceptualisation

1. Does the document mention women with disabilities? (yes/some/no; comments)
2. Does the document identify women with disabilities as a marginalized/most discriminated group? (yes/some/no; comments)
3. Does the document state the disproportionate risk of GBV women with disabilities face?
4. Does the document state the specific needs of women with disabilities?
5. Does the document recognize the compounding inequities resulting from discrimination on grounds of gender, disability, ethnicity, LGBTQI+ and diverse SOGIESC, socio-economic status?
6. Does the document promote the recognition of the diversity within women with disabilities?
7. Does the document establish the causal link between GBV and a physical impairment/serious psychological trauma?
8. Does the document include any strategies on prevention and elimination of gender-based violence against women and girls with disabilities?
9. Does the document prohibit the use of forced sterilization, forced abortion and forced contraception on women with disabilities?
10. Does the document encourage investigation, prosecution and punishment of perpetrators of gender-based violence against women with disabilities?

Data and evidence

11. Does the document promote data collection on GBV that is disaggregated for women with disabilities / Have indicators with targets on GBV amongst women with disabilities?
12. Does the document collect data on the availability and accessibility of services and accommodations for women and girls with disabilities?

Accessibility and inclusive services

13. Does the document ensure that all GBV response programs, complaint mechanisms and services for survivors (SRHR, shelters, psychosocial support, suitable medical equipment, etc.) are fully accessible?
14. Does the document ensure that information about GBV laws and policies and GBV prevention and response is provided in a variety of accessible formats?
15. Does the document ensure all phases of accessing justice for survivors of GBV are accessible (physically accessible police stations and courts, available Sign Language interpretation, etc.)?
16. Does the document ensure training and supervision of service providers (shelter staff, social workers, medical personnel) about the rights and needs of women with disabilities and how to provide respectful care; and the training of police, judicial officials or other

law enforcement personnel on responding to women with disabilities who are victims/survivors of GBV?

Participation and coordination

17. Does the document engage organizations of women with disabilities in the development of GBV programs and policies?
18. Does the document engage organizations of women with disabilities in the implementation and monitoring of GBV programs and policies?

Resources mobilization

19. Does the document include separate budget line items for ensuring equal access to GBV prevention and response programming for women with disabilities?
20. Does the document allocate resources for organizations of women with disabilities to participate in the development, implementation and monitoring of GBV programs and policies?
21. Does the document allocate specific subsidies to women with disabilities who are survivors of GBV?

Global results

Country	Policy	Score of inclusion	Level of inclusion
Algeria	Stratégie Nationale de Lutte contre la Violence à l'égard des Femmes (2007-2011)	5	Invisible
Botswana	National Gender-Based Violence Strategy (2015-2020)	0	Invisible
Burundi	Plan Stratégique National de lutte contre les Violences Sexuelles et celles Basées sur le Genre (2024-2028)	17	Invisible
Cabo Verde	Plano nacional de comate à Violência Baseada no Género (2015-2018)	52	Intentional inclusion
Cameroon	Stratégie Nationale de lutte contre les Violences Basée sur le Genre (2022-2026)	11	Invisible
Comoros	Stratégie Nationale de lutte contre les Violences Basées sur le Genre (2018-2030)	7	Invisible
Congo, Democratic Republic	Stratégie Nationale de lutte contre les Violences Basées sur le Genre révisée (2020)	11	Invisible
Egypt	National Strategy for Combating Violence against Women (2015-2020)	25	Awareness
Eswatini	National Strategy to End Violence and Costed Action Plan (2023-2027)	36	Awareness
Ghana	National Domestic Violence Policy and the Plan of Action to Implement Domestic Violence Act, 2007 (2009-2019)	10	Invisible
Guinea	Stratégie Nationale de lutte contre les Violences Basées sur le Genre (2018-2022)	6	Invisible
Kenya	National policy for prevention and response to GBV (2014)	5	Invisible
Madagascar	Stratégie Nationale de Lutte contre les Violences Basées sur le Genre (2016-2020)	5	Invisible
Malawi	National Plan of Action to Combat Gender-Based Violence in Malawi (2014 – 2020)	14	Invisible
Mali	Programme National de Lutte contre les Violences Basées sur le Genre (2018)	0	Invisible

Country	Policy	Score of inclusion	Level of inclusion
Mauritius	National Strategy and Action Plan on the Elimination of Gender Based Violence (2020-2024)	31	Awareness
Morocco	National Policy to Combat Violence against Women and Girls by 2030	22	Awareness
Mozambique	Plano Nacional de prevenção e combate à Violência Baseada no Género (2018-2021)	3	Invisible
Namibia	National Plan of Action on Gender-Based Violence (2019-2023)	22	Awareness
Niger	Stratégie Nationale de Prévention et de réponse aux Violences Basées sur le Genre au Niger (2017-2021)	7	Invisible
Rwanda	National Strategic Plan for Fighting Against Gender-based Violence (2011-2016)	31	Awareness
Senegal	Plan d'action national de lutte contre les Violences Basées sur le Genre et la promotion des droits humains du Sénégal (2015)	24	Awareness
Seychelles	Domestic Violence Act (2020)	4	Invisible
Sierra Leone	Sierra Leone National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence (2012-2016)	0	Invisible
Somalia	Somalia National Gender-Based Violence Strategy (2018-2020)	0	Invisible
South Africa	National Gender-Based Violence and Femicide Strategic Plan (2020-2030)	70	Strategic inclusion
South Sudan	Standard Operating Procedures for Prevention and Response to Sexual and Gender-based Violence (2014)	0	Invisible
Tanzania	National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children 2017/18 –2021/22)	24	Awareness
Tunisia	Stratégie Nationale de lutte contre les Violences Faites aux Femmes (2016)	18	Invisible
Uganda	National Policy and Action Plan on Elimination of Gender - Based Violence (2016)	8	Invisible
Zimbabwe	National Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender based Violence (2023-2030)	47	Intentional inclusion

Method of calculating the inclusion score

The scoring tool has 21 questions to measure the inclusion of women with disabilities. In order to give a score to the GBV policy, we calculate the score built as follow:

- Each “yes” gets 1 point.
- Each “some” gets 0,5 point.
- Each “no” gets 0 point.
- If a question refers to a measure which was not conceived in the policy, the result is written as “Na”- non available, and the question is removed from the final calculation.

The score is the addition divided by the number of questions answered, giving us a final percentage that fits into one of the five levels of inclusion.

NB: The goal is not to establish what the perfect GBV policy would be, but rather to measure how women with disabilities are included in existing provisions.

Resources

The full database of results of the analysis is available on demand.

Relevant sources used to build the scoring tool are listed hereafter:

- The right to access, Regional Strategic Guidance to increase access to SRHR for Young Persons with Disabilities in East and Southern Africa, SAMRC, UNFPA, KPMG, UKAid, 2017
- Young Persons with Disabilities: Global study on ending GBV and realising SRHR, Aecid, WeDecide, UNFPA, 2018

The scoring levels and their definition have been inspired by:

- The Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, Measuring inclusion tool, 2017, page 9.

Still a long way to go: Inclusion of women with disabilities in African Gender-Based Violence policies, Policy review across 31 countries, Humanity & Inclusion, October 2024

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The 2024 policy review titled "Still a Long Way to Go: Inclusion of Women with Disabilities in African Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Policies," conducted by Humanity & Inclusion (Making It Work Gender and Disability project), highlights the continued exclusion of women with disabilities in national GBV policies across 31 African countries.

The analysis emphasizes the urgent need for inclusive reforms that account for the intersecting discrimination faced by women with disabilities, who are more vulnerable to GBV yet remain largely invisible in policy frameworks.

This review updates the first review conducted in 2020. It highlights that despite global advocacy for diversity and inclusion, there has been limited progress in addressing the needs of women with disabilities in GBV responses.

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