

Disability Inclusion Helpdesk Knowledge Product

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| This Title | Disability Inclusion Review – Rollback on Disability Rights |
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Summary

This report examines whether disability rights are being rolled back. It finds that they are **rarely the primary target of anti-rights actors but are significantly affected by broader rollback of inclusion and human rights.**

The analysis draws on a literature review and six key informant interviews with disability inclusion practitioners, activists, and organisations of women with disabilities. While global in scope, much of the available evidence reflects developments in the United States, United Kingdom, and Europe.

Rollback is understood as the regression or erosion of established rights, distinct from “pushback,” where rights have not yet been realised. The findings indicate that rollback is occurring unevenly: in contexts where disability rights are more established, there is evidence of weakening protections, reduced enforcement, and retrenchment of services; elsewhere, the dominant dynamic is stalled implementation and resistance to progress.

Rollback is occurring within a broader anti-rights movement, primarily targeting gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and LGBT+ rights, but with clear knock-on effects for persons with disabilities. These movements are increasingly organised, transnational, and well-funded, involving coalitions of state and non-state actors. **Disability is therefore engaged indirectly within wider anti-inclusion agendas, including through the weakening of institutions and rights-based frameworks.**

Weaponisation and instrumentalisation of disability is a key feature of these dynamics. Disability is invoked within anti-rights discourse to justify restrictions on other rights, particularly in debates on abortion and LGBT+ inclusion. There is limited evidence that women with disabilities themselves are directly mobilised; rather, they are more often marginalised within these dynamics and face compounded exclusion.

Rollback is affecting disability rights through three main pathways.

1. Political and policy shifts are weakening rights-based approaches and social protections, including backlash against diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), with developments in the United States contributing to global ripple effects that shape norms, funding, and policy environments beyond national contexts.
2. Institutional and civic space contraction is limiting participation, advocacy, and accountability.
3. Financing and resourcing shifts, including aid cuts, are reducing funding for disability inclusion and weakening accountability mechanisms such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In practice, rollback is experienced as a decline in access to services, protections, and accountability for persons with disabilities, often occurring incrementally rather than through explicit legal repeal. These effects are compounded by broader rollback in gender equality and inclusion, with disproportionate impacts on women and girls with disabilities, people with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, and those at the intersection of multiple marginalised identities.

Overall, disability rights are being eroded primarily through indirect pathways, reflecting their dependence on wider inclusion and human rights frameworks.

1. Introduction & Methodology

This report responds to a query entitled “*Disability Inclusion Review – Rollback on Disability Rights.*” The Disability Inclusion and Development (DID) Helpdesk was commissioned to produce a 10–15-page research report and a 1–2-page summary of key findings, drawing on a literature review and key informant interviews (KIIs). **This report is independent and does not necessarily reflect the views of the UK government.**

The research addresses the following questions:

1. Are disability rights being rolled back and what does rollback mean when looking at disability rights?
2. What impact has this had on people with disabilities?
3. What is the impact of the anti-rights movement on women with disabilities?
4. Are women with disabilities being weaponised to strengthen the voice of the anti-rights movement? How they are being used (if they are), and if they are realistically adding any strength to the anti-rights movement?

The research draws on a targeted literature review and six KIIs. Given the evolving and politically sensitive nature of the topic, much of the recent evidence on rollback is captured in blogs, online commentary, and civil society reporting, reflecting the immediacy of current developments and the constraints facing some institutions. This was complemented by a review of selected reports and analyses examining trends in rights rollback from approximately 2015 to the present. The KIIs included a mix of disability inclusion practitioners and experts, activists, and representatives of women lead organisations of persons with disabilities from the USA, UK, South America, West Africa and Southern Africa. Geographically, the scope of the review was global, however, the majority of current literature related to rollback was found to focus on developments on the USA, UK and Europe.

The report distinguishes between different contextual dynamics of rollback, while recognising that recent political shifts in the United States and parts of Europe have been a dominant feature of the current discourse and literature. At the same time, it seeks to reflect impacts at a global level and to amplify perspectives from the Global South, differentiating between broader structural pressures on disability rights and more recent, politically driven rollback trends.

2. Defining rollback in the context of disability rights

Rollback refers to the reduction, withdrawal, or dismantling of established rights and protections, though no single definition exists within human rights discourse.

Rollback generally could be defined as to reduce, decrease, retreat, withdraw, or rescind (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In the context of equity, it can be understood as the “repeal or reduction of policies, regulations, or initiatives designed to address systemic inequalities,” including the dismantling of mechanisms intended to distribute resources or opportunities more justly, and the removal of protective measures or targeted investments for

marginalized communities (Sustainability Directory n.d.a). According to the UK Government Women and Girls Strategy (2023), rollback involves actions that disrupt multilateral negotiations, weaken global standards on gender equality, and enable national-level laws and policies that restrict rights and access to services. These dynamics are often accompanied by division, disinformation and disruption, contributing to weakened civic space and strain on multilateral systems (Wilton Park, 2023).

Rollback is distinct from ‘pushback’, which refers to resistance to the advancement or implementation of rights rather than their removal. Whereas rollback implies the erosion or reversal of established protections, pushback is more specifically defined as “organised, adversarial reaction by governmental bodies, industry groups, or political factions against specific legislative acts or regulatory proposals” (Sustainability Directory, n.d.a), and may occur before rights are fully realised.

This distinction is important in practice, as different contexts reflect different forms and degrees of opposition to rights. Key informant interviews highlighted that in some countries, disability rights have not been rolled back but remain insufficiently implemented. The rights being advocated for have not yet been meaningfully realised and therefore cannot be described as undone. Instead, the dominant dynamic was described as “pushback” (KII), characterised by stalled implementation and limited institutional follow-through. Informants described this occurring along a spectrum: in some contexts, it reflects apathy, disinterest, or deprioritisation, while in others it involves more active resistance. This highlights that opposition to rights may range from passive neglect to deliberate obstruction, and does not always take the form of dismantling established gains.

3. The anti-rights movement and drivers of rollback

Rollback of disability rights is occurring within a broader and evolving anti-rights movement, which provides important context for understanding its drivers and effects. This section therefore outlines key characteristics of the anti-rights movement and how it is shaping current dynamics around rights. While much of the contemporary discourse and mobilisation is focused on gender and LGBT+ rights, both the literature and key informant interviews highlight that these trends have wider, knock-on effects, including for persons with disabilities. These impacts are often intersectional, as efforts to undermine one set of rights can weaken broader human rights frameworks and affect groups whose experiences of exclusion overlap across multiple identities.

3.1 An evolving anti-rights movement

Anti-rights actors are not new, but contemporary movements reflect more organised opposition within a broader context of democratic and human rights erosion. Anti-rights movements have evolved over time, with coalitions challenging established rights frameworks and limiting further progress. The “pro-family” or “anti-gender” movement is one example, emerging since the mid-1990s to rollback policy and norms and undermine

advocacy for gender equality, reproductive rights and LGBT+ rights (McEwen and Narayanaswamy, 2023). Key informant interviews emphasised that current rollback sits within wider trends of shrinking civic space and weakening human rights protections, with developments such as the UN Human Rights Council recognised genocide in Gaza, authoritarian influence in India and China, right-wing shifts across Europe and Latin America, the migration crisis, and the criminalisation of LGBT+ rights in Uganda reflecting a broader environment in which actors are increasingly emboldened to act against the rights of others, contributing to a more hostile environment for inclusion efforts, within which disability inclusion sits (KII).

Literature and key informant interviews identify defining characteristics of the contemporary anti-rights movement. While resistance to rights is not new, the current phase is distinguished by how actors are organised and coordinated (GADN, 2023; Key Informant Interview). Key characteristics of the current anti-rights movement include:

- > **Contemporary anti-rights movements are increasingly organised, professionalised, and transnational.** They involve coalitions of state and non-state actors opposing gender equality and broader inclusion, with resistance becoming more coordinated and institutionalised (GADN, 2023). This has been described as a reorganisation of forces mobilising against hard-won gains, reflected in alliances pursuing systematic dismantling of progress, including policy reversals in the US and anti-gender campaigns in Hungary (Civicus, 2025b).
- > **These movements are driven by a range of ideologies and supported by both established and emerging actors.** They are linked to religious fundamentalisms, nationalisms or ultra-nationalisms, white supremacy, ultra-conservatism, authoritarianism, and right-wing populism (GADN, 2023). Actors include longstanding institutions such as the Vatican/Holy See, alongside newer organisations advancing anti-gender advocacy at the UN (McEwen and Narayanaswamy, 2023), with increasing professionalisation and transnational coordination through funding, recruitment, and engagement with global institutions (Ipas, 2026). Informant interviews also noted in countries in the Global South, anti-rights actors utilise a "Global South vs. Global North" narrative, where they frame rights such as reproductive autonomy and gender identity as "ideological colonisation" by the West.
- > **They are also associated with economic agendas that reduce public expenditure, disproportionately affecting marginalised groups, including persons with disabilities.** Anti-rights movements have been linked to anti-state positions that advance neo-liberal policies and reduce spending at the expense of those most marginalised, contributing to the erosion of human rights institutions and norms (GADN, 2023).

Recent political developments, particularly in the United States, are widely viewed as an apex of longer-term anti-rights trends rather than their sole cause. KIIs highlighted that the deterioration of rights predates Donald Trump's second term in office, with many noting that humanitarian abuses and regression were already underway (KII). While some described the current administration as accelerating or intensifying these dynamics, others emphasised that it represents a "summit" or culmination of longer-term trends, rather than their origin (KII). As such, Trump's presidency has become a focal point in current discourse on rollback, symbolising and amplifying broader shifts within the anti-rights movement (KII).

3.2 Linking anti-rights movements to disability rights

Contemporary anti-rights mobilisation is primarily oriented around opposition to gender equality, SRHR and LGBT+ rights, with disability inclusion typically positioned indirectly within this broader ideological landscape. Informant interviews highlighted that in many contexts there is no direct or organised anti-rights campaigning specifically targeting disability, particularly where gains have been limited (KII). Instead, disability is situated within wider anti-inclusion agendas, where gender and sexuality act as the primary sites of mobilisation, framed as threats to social order and national values (KII; GADN, 2023). One informant noted that this rhetoric has been used to justify the "protection" of women with disabilities through substituted decision-making (guardianship), thereby undermining their right to legal capacity under Article 12 of the CRPD (Informant interview).

A defining feature of the movement is therefore that disability is often engaged indirectly, through broader narratives, policy positions and rhetorical framings rather than explicit targeting. This includes the weakening of civil rights protections and oversight mechanisms, which shape the broader environment in which disability inclusion operates (Spillar, 2025), as well as the re-emergence of regressive discourse, such as framing autism as an "epidemic" that "destroys families" (Gorenstein & Walker, 2025). These dynamics reflect how anti-rights ideologies extend across inclusion agendas, including through narratives that reinforce restrictive understandings of disability, and through the instrumentalisation of disability within arguments used to oppose gender and LGBT+ rights (see Section 3.3 below) (GADN, 2023; Spillar, 2025).

3.3 Weaponisation and instrumentalisation

Weaponisation was found to occur when disability is strategically invoked to legitimise restrictions on other rights, particularly sexual and reproductive autonomy. The Chairperson of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities warned that opponents of reproductive rights "actively and deliberately refer to disability rights" to restrict access to safe abortion, misrepresenting the Convention and falsely constructing disability rights and gender equality as conflicting (OHCHR, 2018). Informant interviews confirmed that disability is deployed within anti-gender and anti-SRHR campaigns, particularly in abortion debates where the stories and images of people with Down syndrome are used to justify broader abortion bans (McGarry, 2018; Graham, 2018). Family-based, some autistic organisations, or conservative-leaning disability organisations were reported to be recruited by anti-rights actors to advance such narratives (KIIs), while organisations of women with disabilities were less visible in leading them. In addition to examples from the US and UK, one key informant interview described similar narratives around children with disabilities and abortion being deployed in the global south (Informant interview). This framing presents disability as a moral rationale for restricting reproductive choice, while obscuring the autonomy and reproductive rights of women with disabilities themselves (KIIs).

Selective amplification of vulnerability narratives constructs hierarchies between marginalised groups. Executive rhetoric portraying trans inclusion as a threat to women's "dignity, safety, and well-being" illustrates how one group's protection is framed as superseding another's rights (Carey, 2026). Informants noted similar dynamics where persons with autism or intellectual disabilities are portrayed as uniquely susceptible to

“gender ideology,” reinforcing stigma and undermining both disability and LGBT+ rights simultaneously. Informant interviews described anti-rights groups offering support to disability organisations that agree to exclude or denounce LGBT+ rights. These narratives manufacture conflict between groups rather than recognising coexistence of rights (Carey, 2026; Informant interviews).

Informant interviews did not identify specific instances of women with disabilities being instrumentalised to roll back disability rights, but highlighted that they face “double jeopardy” within broader dynamics of marginalisation. Women with disabilities are marginalised both as women and as disabled persons, limiting their leadership opportunities and participation in decision-making spaces (KII). This structural marginalisation creates conditions in which their experiences may be invoked by others without recognising their agency, with women with disabilities more likely to be spoken for rather than heard (KII).

Organised feminist solidarity within disability movements acts as a counterweight to instrumentalisation. KIIs identified strong regional and transnational networks, particularly in Latin America, where feminist engagement within disability inclusion spaces has helped resist co-option and instrumentalization of persons with disabilities against women. This organised solidarity was described as a protective factor, helping communities avoid alignment with conservative agendas and maintain rights-based framing (KIIs).

Instrumentalisation of disability rights as a driver of anti-rights outcomes

Narratives that pit rights against one another or instrumentalise disability were described by informants as producing tangible political and policy effects. Rather than remaining rhetorical, these framings were linked to concrete shifts within multilateral processes, domestic law, and transnational advocacy spaces. Examples include the following:

Alignment between governments and anti-rights actors reinforcing rollback agendas. Informant interviews described governments acting in coordination with anti-rights movements, including attacking human rights frameworks, but also defunding CRPD processes as part of broader attacks on inclusion agendas (KIIs).

Removal of inclusive language justified as “protecting” persons with disabilities. A December 2024 CRPD-related resolution reportedly removed sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) language on the grounds of protecting persons with disabilities from ‘being exposed to transgender ideology.’ The Center for Family and Human Rights (C-Fam) characterised this as a victory for “pro-family nations,” and that “the resolution on disabilities specifically addressed mental disabilities, which raised the danger of vulnerable children with disabilities being exposed to transgender ideology.” C-Fam also stated that “girls on the autism spectrum have been shown to be highly vulnerable to exploitation by doctors and clinics in the transgender industry” (C-Fam, 2025). Informants described this as an example of disability being invoked to legitimise weakening LGBT+ protections and narrowing rights commitments (KIIs).

Use of Down Syndrome narratives to justify abortion restrictions Longstanding arguments such as “if abortion were allowed, I wouldn’t exist” were cited as instances where disability narratives are used to support broader abortion bans, without acknowledging the reproductive autonomy of persons with disabilities (KIIs).

Emerging threats to legal capacity reforms under conservative resurgence. In Latin

America, previously progressive reforms banning guardianship and promoting supported decision-making were described as vulnerable amid conservative political shifts, with fears of reinstating restrictive frameworks limiting autonomy (KIIs).

4. Pathways and impacts of rollback

This section examines how rollback - understood as the regression and erosion of established rights - is occurring in practice, and what the impact is on disability inclusion. Building on the analysis above, literature and key informant interviews identify three primary pathways through which rollback is manifesting: political and policy shifts, changes in financing and resourcing, and contraction of civic and institutional space. Each pathway is explored in turn, outlining both how rollback is being operationalised and what its impact is on disability rights in practice.

4.1 Political and policy shifts

Rhetorical shifts within the anti-rights movement are centred on “pro-family” narratives, primarily targeting gender equality, SRHR and LGBT+ rights, but also encompass regressive framings of disability. Anti-rights actors frame their agendas around defending the “natural family” and opposing what they characterise as socially radical policies, as reflected in the positioning of organisations such as C-Fam and the UN Family Rights Caucus (McEwen and Narayanaswamy, 2023). While these narratives are primarily directed at gender and sexuality, informant interviews indicate that they also extend to disability, reinforcing traditional, medicalised and charity-based understandings of disability (KII). For example, characterisations of autism as an “epidemic” that “destroys families,” described as a throwback to earlier stigmatising eras (Gorenstein & Walker, 2025), and the public derision of accessibility measures such as American Sign Language interpretation (Nović, 2025), alongside commentary described as among the most negative in recent decades (Carey, 2026).

Disability is increasingly framed through welfare discourse rather than rights. With people with disabilities portrayed as dependent on the state or a burden on public resources, and inclusion recast in terms of care rather than entitlement and participation (KII). For example, in the US, executive narratives have portrayed homeless people, disproportionately disabled, as threats to public safety, justifying expanded civil commitment under looser criteria (Carey, 2026). Informants similarly described disability being framed as a matter of care rather than justice: acceptable within welfare or charity models, but not as a basis for autonomy, political participation or deinstitutionalisation. This positioning reinforces medicalised narratives and weakens rights-based claims by presenting disability as something to be managed rather than protected through enforceable rights (KIIs).

Much of the current literature on rollback focuses on political developments in the United States and parts of Europe, where attacks on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) agendas are translating into the rollback of disability rights through institutional

and policy retrenchment. Executive and legislative actions in the US have dismantled DEI and DEIA programmes, removed diversity considerations from hiring and training, terminated related contracts and grants, and placed staff on leave (Alexiou, 2025; Davidson, 2025; Center for Racial and Disability Justice, 2024), developments characterised as undoing progress in disability inclusion (Smith, 2025). These shifts are accompanied by the weakening of established protections under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 through rescinded guidance, reduced enforcement and proposed rule changes (Sahhar, 2025; Diament, 2025; Nović, 2025), alongside broader retrenchment affecting services and institutional capacity (Ives-Ruble & Doherty, 2025). Similar dynamics are reflected in the UK, where political and welfare discourse has shifted away from rights-based approaches towards conditionality and cost containment, alongside the weakening or omission of commitments to disability rights frameworks (Mauch et al., 2025; Labour Hub, 2023). Together, these developments illustrate how anti-rights rhetoric is being operationalised through policy and institutional change.

Disability inclusion is increasingly caught up within contentious DEI debates, losing its previous positioning as a less controversial rights issue. Informants observed that disability was previously sometimes treated in diplomatic engagement as a “least contentious” rights agenda that could progress even when broader gender or LGBT+ discussions stalled. This dynamic is shifting. As inclusion itself becomes politically contentious amid DEI backlash, disability can no longer be advanced separately. Where there is no space to discuss inclusion broadly, disability inclusion also falls away. This shift is influenced by global political developments and is not confined to a single country (KII).

Rollback of disability rights is occurring through the erosion of policy safeguards and the retrenchment of social protections that underpin access to services. Welfare reforms, reduced public investment and weakened enforcement are reversing or diluting previously established entitlements to care, income support, health and education for persons with disabilities (Carey, 2026). As disability rights are largely positive rights requiring functioning institutions, trained personnel and sustained funding, these shifts represent a regression in the practical realisation of rights, even where legal frameworks remain in place (Carey, 2026). Informant interviews similarly emphasised that as rollback progresses and institutions weaken, access to services deteriorates first, with declining quality, reduced staffing and limited upgrades, leaving services “not up to scratch,” particularly for women and girls with disabilities (KII).

Rollback related to disability inclusion specifically is commonly documented in the United States and United Kingdom, where policy retrenchment has reversed or weakened established protections and access to support. In the UK, austerity and welfare reforms have reduced support, tightened eligibility and widened inequalities for persons with disabilities (Pring, 2015; Disability Rights UK, 2018), alongside proposals to further restrict access to disability benefits and reduce support in real terms (The Disability Union, 2025). Crisis measures have enabled the suspension or dilution of rights to care and support (Sabin, 2020; Pring, 2025). In the United States, reductions in Medicaid and community-based services, staffing cuts, and attempts to weaken Section 504 protections signal a rollback in access to healthcare and education (Carey, 2026; Floyd, 2025). Across

both contexts, cuts to social protections directly undermine previously established guarantees that support independent living and economic security (Carey, 2026).

While the evidence base is concentrated in these contexts, KIs indicate that rollback in social protections is occurring more widely under broader political and ideological shifts. Informants described global social protection cuts under right-wing conservative governments globally, linked to a reframing of disability as a cost burden that legitimises reductions in public spending and the dismantling of disability-related institutional structures (KII). Globally, restrictions on SRHR, reduced investment in inclusive education and weakening social protection systems reflect broader rollback of inclusion commitments, disproportionately affecting persons with disabilities (Wilton Park, 2023; Barr, 2025). Informants noted that this rollback often occurs incrementally, with declining service standards and reduced support becoming normalised over time, making regression less visible but structurally entrenched (KII).

4.2 Retrenchment of aid and funding for disability inclusion

Rollback is also occurring through the retrenchment of funding for inclusion agendas, driven by political decisions that are reshaping global aid priorities and resourcing environments. This contraction is linked to wider political-economic shifts, including the rise of authoritarian and right-wing conservative governments, reduced investment in international cooperation, and increased prioritisation of military spending (KII). The most prominent contractions in aid funding in this space are from the USA. In 2025, the Trump administration reduced funding for international aid programmes supporting women and girls, and dismantled teams responsible for advancing gender equality in aid programming (Barr, 2025). This continued in 2026 through the expansion of a global gag rule, which applies restrictions not only to abortion-related services but also to so-called “gender ideology” and diversity, equity and inclusion, extending to NGOs, governments and multilateral institutions receiving US funding (Friedrich-Karnik & Damavandi, 2026; Daigle & Michalko, 2026). These measures represent an escalation in the use of foreign assistance to impose an anti-rights agenda globally, restricting programming, advocacy and discourse across health, development and humanitarian systems (Friedrich-Karnik & Damavandi, 2026). By closing down space for DEI and broader inclusion efforts, they also constrain the enabling environment for disability inclusion, illustrating how rollback targeting gender and equality agendas extends to disability rights.

In practice, this rollback is resulting in a sharp contraction of funding for disability inclusion, with disability frequently deprioritised as budgets shrink. KIs highlighted that when funding contracts, disability is often siloed or deprioritised within development programming, reinforcing existing marginalisation (KII). This is reflected in reports of civil society funding having “collapsed,” with disability funding already limited and “falling off a cliff,” and the collapse of USAID decimating funding streams and technical expertise (KII). Disability and gender–disability initiatives remain chronically underfunded, with aid cuts and backlash against gender equality frameworks further reducing available resources (Doherty & Ives-Ruble, 2025; Barr, 2025). A study found that 42% of organisations working at the

intersection of gender and disability lost more than half of their funding, with 18% ceasing operations and reporting the halting of sexual and reproductive health, livelihood and disability rights activities (Minieri & Satya, 2025). It also found that less than 2% of philanthropy funding supports women's rights and less than 5% of that is directed toward women, girls and gender-diverse people with disabilities (Minieri & Satya, 2025).

The impact of US aid cuts are reverberating globally. Literature and key informant interviews both highlight that actions by major economies are shaping global norms by signalling that commitments to inclusion can be weakened, contributing to the erosion of standards, accountability mechanisms and resourcing environments that underpin disability inclusion (Civicus, 2025b; Smith, 2025; Trotman, 2025).

Funding contraction driven by broader rollback in resourcing for inclusion initiatives is unevenly experienced but disproportionately destabilises already marginal disability actors. Informants noted that many grassroots disability and organisations of women with disabilities have historically operated with little or no funding, often self-financing their activities. While cuts linked to declining inclusion funding do not remove a core revenue stream for these groups, the loss of sub-grantee roles and small funding channels—amid increased competition for a shrinking pool of resources—further narrows already limited space (KII). At the same time, international umbrella networks and formalised organisations are more immediately destabilised by these funding reductions, risking stagnation or rollback of coordinated disability rights advocacy infrastructure (KII).

Shifts in global funding power are creating accountability gaps within international human rights systems. As governments reduce development budgets and withdraw from multilateral engagement, large philanthropic actors are filling financing gaps, creating an accountability vacuum. Reduced funding for human rights infrastructure, including CRPD processes and committees, risks weakening monitoring and oversight mechanisms. Informants warned that if CRPD processes lack sufficient budget commitments, their ability to function effectively diminishes, eroding institutional counterweights to anti-rights narratives and weakening formal protections for women with disabilities (KIIs).

Escalating insecurity and instability compound vulnerability and restrict access to justice and protection. In insecure environments, declining service quality and limited institutional oversight reduce safeguards against exploitation. Girls with disabilities channelled into segregated education pathways face subsequent barriers to employment, reinforcing long-term exclusion. In some contexts, women and girls with intellectual disabilities encounter severe barriers to accessing justice, with raising complaints or bringing cases to court described as extremely difficult or effectively impossible (KIIs).

4.3 Institutional and civic space contraction

Civic space is contracting globally, reshaping the environment in which disability

advocacy operates and limiting opportunities for participation and engagement.

Informant interviews described increasing regulation of civil society, including tighter NGO registration requirements, foreign agent laws, and the closure of participatory and consultative forums, as part of broader efforts to capture civic space (KII). This contraction is occurring alongside wider pushback on rights and institutional restructuring, including the closure of disability offices and units, which further constrains engagement (KII). In more autocratic contexts such as some Central Asian countries, governments are openly attacking gender and human rights actors (KII). These dynamics are forcing organisations into more defensive postures, restricting consultation processes, and creating increasing barriers to dialogue and policy engagement for disability actors (KII).

Intersectional actors, particularly organisations of women with disabilities, are experiencing compounded constraints within a shrinking and increasingly fragmented civic space.

Informant interviews highlighted that women and girls with disabilities face disproportionate impacts as intersectional organising becomes more politically sensitive, with clampdowns on LGBT+ rights creating chilling effects for cross-movement engagement and discouraging association between civil society actors (KII). In contexts such as Uganda, the criminalisation of LGBT+ rights has further limited collaboration, with organisations reluctant to engage across movements due to fear of repercussions (KII). At the same time, informants noted that disability movements have not always been strongly connected to feminist and LGBT+ movements globally, which can obscure the full extent of intersectional impacts, particularly for disabled queer communities (KII). As gender protections are rolled back and women's rights spaces come under pressure, participation by women with disabilities becomes further constrained, producing what informants described as a "double constriction" of shrinking civic space and narrowing gender space (KII).

Hierarchies within disability movements further exacerbate exclusion under constrained conditions. Informants acknowledged longstanding hierarchies within disability movements, with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities often the most marginalised. Invisible disabilities may fall off the agenda more quickly when political space narrows and nuance is lost. As rollback intensifies and inclusion debates become polarised, maintaining attention across the full spectrum of disabilities becomes more difficult (KIIs).

Disability is frequently treated as an optional add-on within broader democratic struggles, compounding the effects of institutional contraction. Informants described disability as consistently sidelined; funded "when times are good" and reduced first during funding cuts. Disability and gender are often siloed from what are framed as "core" anti-democracy struggles, with an implicit assumption that inclusion can be revisited once broader democratic issues are resolved. This framing fails to recognise disability, including women with disabilities, as integral to democratic and human rights responses (KIIs).

As multilateral spaces become more divided and less able to reaffirm established rights language (Civicus, 2025b; Wilton Park, 2023), and as civic and participatory spaces narrow, the institutional scaffolding supporting gender equality and inclusion weakens. Disability inclusion, often reliant on broader equality frameworks and accountability mechanisms, is therefore indirectly but significantly undermined.

The rise of conservative narratives within disability inclusion spaces complicates solidarity and advocacy. Within the disability sector itself, informants noted that hyper-conservative voices are gaining prominence. Informants noted increasing emphasis on family-centred narratives, sometimes at the expense of autonomy and independent living frameworks. In abortion debates, narratives around Down syndrome have been mobilised within broader anti-rights framing, with family and some autistic organisations visible in advancing anti-abortion positions, while organisations of women with disabilities were not commonly observed leading such narratives. These internal dynamics create risks of disability being used to legitimise wider anti-rights agendas (KII).

4.4 Cross-cutting impacts

In addition to the impacts outlined across different pathways of rollback, several cross-cutting impacts are evident and outlined below. These include intersectional impacts, as well as differences in how rollback affects people with different types of impairments.

Gendered and intersectional impacts

Anti-gender backlash disproportionately harms women and girls with disabilities by reinforcing existing inequalities in work, care, and bodily autonomy. Informant interviews noted that anti-rights mobilisation targets gender equality, SRHR and feminism, framing them as threats to social order (KII). In practice, this compounds structural exclusion: women with disabilities are far less likely to be in employment and face increased unpaid care burdens (2026 data). They are also at heightened risk of sexual violence and practices such as forced sterilisation or coerced contraception, reinforced by anti-rights narratives around substituted decision-making. Restrictions on SRHR, combined with barriers such as inaccessible transport and lack of sign-language interpretation, further limit access to services and education. Informants noted that even minimal protections previously available to women with disabilities are being eroded under this broader backlash (Informant Interview).

Rollback of abortion access and SRHR compounds existing barriers faced by women with disabilities, making access more constrained than for women without disabilities. Informant interviews emphasised that while abortion restrictions do not explicitly target women with disabilities, they face additional challenges in accessing safe services, including mobility constraints, difficulties travelling across jurisdictions, and limited availability of accessible provision. General gender rollback therefore produces compounding effects for women and girls with disabilities. Globally, regression in SRHR frameworks disproportionately affects those facing intersecting marginalisation, including disability (Wilton Park, 2023). In the US, abortion bans and historical patterns of forced sterilisation illustrate the continuing precarity of bodily autonomy for disabled women, particularly women of colour

(HRW, 2023). Restrictive reproductive policies heighten risks for those whose impairments make pregnancy medically dangerous (Kim, 2023).

Weakening enforcement mechanisms compounds exposure to violence and protection failure for women and girls with disabilities. Informant interviews described a significant data gap on violence against women and girls with disabilities, referring to a “big hole” in available evidence despite serious concern. Disabled women face significantly higher rates of sexual violence (Kim, 2023), and insecurity and institutional weakening increase exposure to abuse. **Women with disabilities face heightened risks of sexual violence and may lack accessible reporting mechanisms if support systems are cut (Kim, 2023).**

Intersectionality theory underscores how overlapping identities, disability, race, gender, sexuality, intensify vulnerability when legal safeguards weaken (Trotman, 2025). Informant interviews similarly highlighted that shrinking participatory space and gender backlash further reduce avenues for redress (KII).

Transgender people with disabilities and other marginalised groups face additional barriers under gender-focused rollback. Informant interviews noted that anti-gender backlash is also affecting trans people with disabilities, especially in contexts where some groups are recognised and protected while others are excluded or even criminalised. This means that people who are both disabled and part of other marginalised groups can face multiple, overlapping challenges (KII).

Differential impairment-specific impacts

Rollback is not experienced uniformly, with certain impairment groups facing heightened and distinct risks. Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities are particularly affected by cuts to community-based services and increased risks of institutionalisation (Carey, 2026). Informant interviews highlighted that women and girls with intellectual disabilities face severe barriers to seeking accountability in cases of abuse, with bringing complaints or accessing courts described in some contexts as extremely difficult or effectively impossible. As institutional safeguards weaken, risks of segregation and confinement increase (KII).

Psychosocial disabilities are facing intensified stigma, scapegoating and coercive policy trends. Informant interviews described people with psychosocial disabilities as being in a particularly precarious position, with relatively few representative organisations and heightened exposure to stigma. In times of crisis, mental health is frequently politicised, and individuals are portrayed as violent, problematic or burdensome to the state. Legislative trends toward stricter involuntary commitment across several regions were cited as generating fear of detention, involuntary treatment and institutionalisation. Informants cautioned that increased funding alone will not address these structural stigma dynamics and noted concerns about unintended consequences of some international mental health campaigns (KII).

Deaf communities and other sign language users are disproportionately affected where accessibility measures are reduced. Reductions in interpretation services and

accessible public communication disproportionately affect Deaf individuals and other sign language users (Carey, 2026). As accessibility is deprioritised within public institutions, communication barriers widen, limiting equal participation in education, employment and civic life.

Intersectional identities further compound impairment-specific vulnerabilities.

Transgender disabled people face compounded discrimination where disability protections and gender-affirming care are simultaneously targeted (Doherty & Ives-Ruble, 2025). Informant interviews similarly underscored that women and girls with disabilities face elevated risks in insecure environments, particularly those with intellectual disabilities who encounter systemic barriers to justice and protection.

5. Conclusion

This report finds that disability rights are being rolled back, although unevenly and in context-specific ways. While they are not typically the primary focus of anti-rights mobilisation, they are nonetheless being directly and indirectly undermined through hostile rhetoric, policy retrenchment, weakening protections, and broader rollback of inclusion and human rights. These dynamics are occurring within a wider anti-rights movement that is reshaping political, institutional, and funding environments in ways that negatively affect disability inclusion.

In contexts where rights are more established, this takes the form of erosion in services, safeguards, enforcement, and institutional commitment. Elsewhere, the dominant dynamic is pushback, where rights have not yet been fully realised.

The impacts highlighted in this report show that as inclusion is contested and diminished, **those already most marginalised are pushed further to the margins**. Disability, often positioned lower within hierarchies of inclusion, is deprioritised in rhetoric, funding, and service provision, with compounded effects for those at the intersection of multiple forms of marginalisation.

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