



Ms. Gertrude Oforiwa Fefoame

Chair, Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
8-14 Avenue de la Paix CH-1211 Geneva (Switzerland)
Via E-mail: ohchr-crpd@un.org

**OPD Report on the Implementation Gaps in Accessibility, Education, and
Political Participation in Mali**

Submitted by AccessibilityAtlas

an organization of young persons advancing disability rights throughout the world

**33rd Session of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
11-29 August 2025**

Submitted 13 July 2025

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Introduction

AccessibilityAtlas presents this report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ahead of the 33rd session for the review of Finland. AccessibilityAtlas is a global non profit organization based in the United States, committed to creating a world where people of all abilities can fully participate in their communities.

AccessibilityAtlas collaborates with civil society, international mechanisms, institutions of higher education, and local governments to catalyze change around the thematic issues of accessibility in civics and education for persons with disabilities worldwide. We actively engage with the United Nations human rights mechanisms in Geneva and beyond, to address accessibility gaps and advocate for systemic solutions.

Our reporting process involves comprehensive research on nation-states under review by the CRPD Committee, dialogue with civil society and individuals with disabilities in those

countries, and collaborative drafting of reports to highlight successes, challenges and gaps in accessibility.

This petition is centered on five main issues: (1) infrastructural and legal compliance with accessibility standards; (2) accessible communication and transportation for persons with disabilities; (3) progress in the advancement towards accessible information in all formats; (4) the rights of children with disabilities; and (5) electoral barriers for persons with disabilities.

Infrastructural and Legal Compliance with Accessibility Standards

Implementation of the 2017 Construction Act and 2019 Building Code

In recent years, Mali has made efforts to increase accessibility through various legislative initiatives such as the 2017 Construction Act and the 2019 Building Code. The 2017 Construction Act was ratified to ensure accessibility principles were being implemented into building and urban planning processes. Furthermore, the 2019 Building Code set detailed accessibility norms for private and public spaces; it includes a chapter affirming the right of persons with disabilities to have full, unimpeded access to public spaces.¹ Despite these legislative advances, there are still gaps in the two aforementioned laws. In response, Mali has sought international assistance to help develop architectural guidelines and manuals for accessibility.

It is important to note that the 2017 Act and 2019 code only applies to newly built structures. There are no specifications outlining changes to existing buildings, unless they undergo major renovations. Many public buildings, such as government offices, universities, and other cultural sites, fall under the latter category. Therefore, many crucial facilities will remain inaccessible for the foreseeable future. Exacerbating this issue, Mali lacks a public plan on how to address the lack of accessibility in existing infrastructure. The National Strategy for the Socio-Economic Promotion of Persons with Disabilities 2015–2024 mentions accessibility as a way to include PWDs in the economy, but has yet to result in concrete actions.² Mali's fiscal limitations have been halting the strategy's implantation as a whole, halting the lack of development of the national accessibility action plan.

¹United Nations:

<https://docs.un.org/en/CRPD/C/SEN/1#:~:text=the%20Programme%20at%20an>

²Voices of CRPD:

<https://www.hi.org/crpd/en/djikine-hatouma-gakou#:~:text=20th%20country%20to%20ratify%20the%20disabilities%20has%20been%20elaborated%20for>

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The lack of proper infrastructure and legal compliance with accessibility standards has caused massive reductions in the quality of life for persons with disabilities in Mali. As many vital public buildings such as government offices, universities, cultural sites, etc... are inaccessible, quality of life is heavily hindered. Women with disabilities, in particular, report being rejected by their families and communities, and face violence/abuse. The absence of accessible administrative buildings and public transport further limits their participation in social, economic, and political life, creating a vehement cycle of social exclusion.³ Persons with disabilities who live in rural areas face issues accessing basic needs such as water fountains and sanitation facilities as they have not undergone the necessary updates to accommodate persons with disabilities.

We urge the Committee to ask: **How will older buildings, which are not currently covered by the 2017 Construction Act and the 2019 Building Code, be brought into compliance with these updated standards?**

Despite recent legislative improvements, accessibility remains limited in practice due to the exclusion of existing infrastructure from compliance obligations. We urge the Committee to recommend that Mali adopt a National Accessibility Retrofit Strategy, with clear timelines, priority targets (e.g., public service centers and rural facilities), and financing mechanisms.

To incentivize broader participation in accessibility initiatives, Mali's government should impose tax breaks for companies that contribute to the development of accessible public infrastructure. These incentives should extend to any company or organization that funds or provides training for contractors in implementing accessible design and construction. The Committee should support the creation of public-private partnerships that help bridge the resource gap and promote inclusive infrastructure development across the country.

Enforcement of Minimum Accessibility Standards and Lack Thereof

Despite the passage of the 2017 Construction Act and 2019 Building Code, as of late 2023, the government still had not issued the disability identification cards mandated by the laws, which, among other benefits, would entitle holders to free health services.⁴

³National Report on the Situation of Women with Disabilities in Mali, 2020:
<https://gcap.global/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/LNWB-Mali-Country-Report.pdf>

⁴Maliweb:
<https://www.maliweb.net/societe/loi-n2018-027-relative-aux-droits-des-personnes-vivant-avec-un-handicap>

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Mali's government has taken little action to further the implementation of the 2017 Construction Act and the 2019 Building Code. Had the 2019 Building Code and related norms been rigorously enforced, new school constructions would all include accessible features (ramps, handrails, disability-friendly toilets), and older schools would by now have retrofitting plans.⁵ This has clearly not been implemented, as according to a national WASH report, fewer than 16% of schools in Mali have even minimal accessible sanitation facilities (improved latrines accessible to students with disabilities).⁶ Instead of government led developments, NGOs have begun implementing improvements on a project by project basis. Handicap International's initiative that retrofitted 103 classrooms and other facilities – was an NGO-driven effort, and perhaps the most impactful in the country.⁷

Mali's issues with enforcing the implementation of accessibility legislation are rooted in the problem that responsibility is spread across several committees. There is no specific agency or committee spearheading efforts. Mali's 2018 disability law did call for a *National Follow-up Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* to monitor implementation,⁸ but this committee was only formally established by decree in September 2021 and is not yet fully operational. Another hindrance to Mali's implementation of accessibility laws is the lack of incentives or penalties to promote compliance throughout the country.

The lack of implementation of the 2017 Construction Act and 2019 Building code has caused massive loss in quality of life for all persons with disabilities. 93% of schools do not conduct any awareness sessions on menstrual hygiene management for girls, let alone adapted sessions for those with disabilities.⁹

⁵UNESCO:

<https://education-profiles.org/sub-saharan-africa/mali/~inclusion#:~:text=regional%20directors%20to%20take%20a%20l%20to%20the%20Handicap%20International%20intervention>

⁶UNESCO:

<https://education-profiles.org/sub-saharan-africa/mali/~inclusion#:~:text=In%202017%2C%20the%20Ministry%20of%20To%20date%2C%20there%20is%20no>

⁷UNESCO:

<https://education-profiles.org/sub-saharan-africa/mali/~inclusion#:~:text=regional%20directors%20to%20take%20a%20l%20to%20the%20Handicap%20International%20intervention>

⁸ JOURNAL OFFICIEL DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE DU MALI:

<https://sgg-mali.ml/JO/2018/mali-jo-2018-22.pdf#:~:text=FINALES%20Article%2027%20%3A%20Il%20Pr%C3%A9sident%20de%20la%20R%C3%A9publique>

⁹UNESCO:

<https://education-profiles.org/sub-saharan-africa/mali/~inclusion#:~:text=summary%2C%20it%20states%20that%2051,the%20extent%20to%20which%20WASH>

We urge the Committee to ask: **What steps will the delegation take to ensure the full implementation of the 2017 Construction Act and 2019 Building Code, particularly regarding the issuance of disability identification cards, the accessibility of school infrastructure, and the operationalization of the National Follow-up Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities?**

To strengthen enforcement and incentivize compliance, Mali should adopt a framework of progressive penalties and rewards for public institutions and contractors. We recommend that the Committee advocate for a system of sanctions for non-compliance with accessibility standards in new construction, and tax credits or recognition schemes for those who voluntarily retrofit or exceed minimum standards.

Accessible Communication and Transportation for Persons with Disabilities

Accessibility of Public Information and Disability-Related Communication

Whether through television, radio, print, or the internet, public information in Mali is often not provided in formats accessible to persons with disabilities. This is a significant issue, as Mali's 2018 disability law states "persons living with a disability have the right to information and communication adapted to their disability."¹⁰ This law requires the government and media to offer official information in formats such as: sign language interpretation, subtitles, Braille, and audio transcription. Yet, these measures are rarely implemented.

Despite Mali's ratification of the previously mentioned 2018 disability law, the implementation of accessibility to information remains insufficient. The Union Malienne des Aveugles (UMAV) is the country's only major source of Braille publications and only possesses one embosser machine, the only one in the nation.¹¹

However, Mali has taken some initial steps to address these shortcomings. As previously stated, the 2018 disability law aimed to increase the formats of official information that the government and media provide to the public. Although these measures have not been widely

¹⁰JOURNAL OFFICIEL DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE DU MALI:
<https://sgg-mali.ml/JO/2018/mali-jo-2018-22.pdf#:~:text=Article%2023%20%3A%20Les%20personnes,de%20l%E2%80%99accessibility%C3%A9%20et%20de%20la>

¹¹UN CRPD:
<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g25/054/07/pdf/g2505407.pdf>

implemented, it is a step in the right direction. Additionally, in 2021, the Ministry of Social Development started a public awareness campaign with OPDs.¹² During the COVID-19 pandemic, some televised health updates had sign language interpretation, which was applauded by the deaf community. However, this practice was not sustained after the pandemic.¹³

Similarly, there is no national mandate requiring television broadcasts to provide sign language interpretation or captioning. There is also a lack of guidelines for government website accessibility.¹⁴ Even public institutions such as courts and hospitals rarely provide communication accommodations, and few civil servants are trained in sign language.¹⁵ The government of Mali also fails to recognize Malian sign language as an official language, which limits its integration within the government.¹⁶

We urge the Committee to ask: **What concrete steps will the delegation take to ensure that official information is made available in accessible formats—such as sign language interpretation, subtitles, Braille, and audio transcription—as mandated by the 2018 disability law?**

Access to public information is a fundamental right and a prerequisite for participation in public life. We urge the Committee to recommend that Mali adopt a national policy on accessible communications, which includes legally binding requirements for sign language interpretation and captioning on televised broadcasts, accessibility guidelines for government websites, and funding for Braille production. This policy should also formally recognize Malian Sign Language as an official language, ensuring its use across public services and communications.

¹²*Sight Savers:*

<https://www.sightsavers.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Sightsavers-Global-Annual-Report-2021.pdf>

¹³*United Nations:*

https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2020/05/sg_policy_brief_on_persons_with_disabilities_final.pdf

¹⁴*Human Rights Watch:*

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/02/22/people-disabilities-humanitarian-emergencies-and-situations-risk>

¹⁵*Amnesty International:*

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/AFR3760872022ENGLISH.pdf>

¹⁶*Social Protection:*

https://socialprotection-humanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/wcms_817572.pdf?utm_

Compliance and Training Measures for Public Transport Operators

Throughout Mali, persons with disabilities face both structural and attitudinal barriers in the public transport system. This issue is especially prevalent in Bamako, which has a population of over 4 million. Many forms of public transportation, such as Sotramas (privately owned mini buses), taxis, and motorcycle taxis, commonly have high steps, narrow doors, and no space for wheelchairs. A Global Disability Inclusion Report by the International Disability Alliance also found that the absence of accessible infrastructure and training are some of the most commonly seen accessibility obstacles worldwide, especially in low and middle-income nations.¹⁷

Although Mali's 2018 Disability Law promises equal access to public transportation services, implementation is limited.¹⁸ A 2020 diagnostic by the Sub-Saharan Africa Transport Policy Program (SSATP) observed that Mali does not have adequate national standards or guidelines on accessibility, resulting in an absence of funding for low-floor buses, ramps, or announcements for visual or auditory impediments.¹⁹ Therefore, most transport vehicles are physically inaccessible, and no accessibility requirements are enforced by authorities.

Government initiatives regarding accessible transport are also very fragmented. There are no regulations to implement the mandate from 2018, and the Ministry of Transport has not created set standards for public or private transport vehicle operators. There has been a reform roadmap for Bamako's public transport; however, it focuses mainly on modernization and not inclusion.²⁰

Many obstacles remain in the design of public transportation vehicles, as well as in operating them. Most public transport vehicles are second-hand imports designed without accessibility in mind, and infrastructure such as bus stops or sidewalks lack curb ramps, paving, or boarding aids. A 2024 global scoping review published in *Frontiers in Rehabilitation Sciences*

¹⁷*Global Accessibility Summit:*

https://www.globaldisabilitysummit.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/GIP03351-UNICEF-GDIR-Full-report_Proof-4.pdf?utm_

¹⁸*African Disability Rights Yearbook:*

https://upjournals.up.ac.za/index.php/adry/article/view/500?utm_

¹⁹*SSATP (African Transport Policy Program)*

https://www.ssatp.org/publication/policies-sustainable-mobility-and-accessibility-cities-mali-diagnostic-study?utm_

²⁰*Mobilise Your City:*

https://www.mobiliseyourcity.net/policies-sustainable-accessibility-and-mobility-urban-areas-mali-ssatp?utm_

identifies these obstacles as barriers that mainly impact persons with disabilities in low-income areas.²¹

We urge the Committee to ask: **What steps will the delegation take to establish national accessibility standards for public and private transportation systems, and to ensure enforcement of the 2018 Disability Law’s provisions on equal access to transit for persons with disabilities?**

Accessible public transportation is essential for independent living and civic participation. We urge the Committee to recommend that Mali adopt a National Inclusive Mobility Framework that mandates accessibility standards for all forms of public and paratransit systems, including privately operated minibuses and taxis. This framework should include technical guidelines for low-floor vehicles, curb ramps, and onboard announcements, as well as financial support for retrofitting existing vehicles and training transport operators on disability-inclusive service. Particular focus should be placed on implementation in urban centers like Bamako, where inaccessibility most severely limits mobility and opportunity.

Accessibility of Island Harbors and Road Infrastructure Improvements

In Mali, persons with disabilities face significant challenges navigating ports and roadways, which are two important facets in public transport and economic inclusion. Since Mali is landlocked, it relies heavily on its road system and open parts of the Niger River in order to connect the country. However, neither the road system nor the river transport system has been adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities. Island harbors such as the ones in Mopti, Timbuktu, and Gao are still inaccessible with no ramps, signage, or protective railings. Road conditions are also inadequate as they have many unpaved surfaces, steep curbs, and some missing pedestrian walkways. According to the World Health Organization’s 2011 global report, inaccessible public infrastructure is one of the primary reasons persons with disabilities are disproportionately excluded from social and economic participation.²²

Similar to previously mentioned issues, Mali’s 2018 Disability Law gives the right to accessible transport and infrastructure, yet it is minimally implemented. River harbors and island ports still don’t have assistive features such as lowered decks, ramps, or floor markings. In 2023, the World Bank conducted an Environmental and Social Review Summary of road projects in Mali and concluded that “accessibility for persons with disabilities remains unaddressed in rural

²¹*Frontiersin:*

<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/rehabilitation-sciences/articles/10.3389/fresc.2023.1336514/full>

²²*World Health Organization:*

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241564182>

infrastructure designs.²³ Despite large-scale road projects, there have been no design standards aimed at adding accessible features to roads.

Mali has conducted some initiatives to improve its roads. In 2023, Mali launched the Road Connectivity and Resilience Project, aiming to make more economic connections and improve climate resilience with roads. However, this project still lacks standards for accessible infrastructure.² Mali's involvement in the Niger River Basin Movement program and port modernization movements in Mopti and Timbuktu have also not been focused on accessibility and rather navigation and dredging.

The inaccessibility of road and harbor infrastructure has detrimental effects on the independence of persons with disabilities in Mali. In remote river communities, river transport is the only method of travel for parts of the year, and it remains inaccessible. Deteriorating roadways and a lack of pedestrian infrastructure limit persons with disabilities from accessing social, economic, health, and political services. This limited mobility also contributes to poverty. As the World Bank's 2023 project states, inclusive infrastructure is not only a rights issue but an economic one.² Without serious reform, persons with disabilities in Mali will remain disconnected from the rest of society.

We urge the Committee to ask: **What measures will the delegation take to ensure that current and future infrastructure projects—including those related to ports, roadways, and river transport—are aligned with the 2018 Disability Law's guarantees on accessible transport and infrastructure?**

Inclusive infrastructure is both a human right and an economic necessity. We urge the Committee to recommend that Mali adopt national accessibility design standards for all transport infrastructure, including ports, harbors, rural roadways, and pedestrian walkways. These standards should be integrated into all existing and future projects such as the Road Connectivity and Resilience Project and the Niger River Basin initiatives. Specific features should include ramps, tactile floor markings, railings, signage, and curb modifications. The Committee should also encourage the inclusion of disability rights organizations in infrastructure planning and monitoring processes to ensure sustained accountability and local relevance.

²³World Bank:

<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099112724080023714/pdf/P50792114ab4f006189801b0d465d369e8.pdf>

Progress in the Advancement Towards Accessible Information in All Formats

Insufficient Access to Diverse Information Formats for Civic Participation

Though 15.5%²⁴ of Mali's citizens- 2.5 million people²⁵- account for the disabled population, the current legislative framework enables a major barrier that undermines electoral participation. The government's failing provisions to provide diverse information formats, hinder the civic participation of many voters, jeopardizing their right to confidentiality.

A substantial portion of the Malian population require diverse information formats, as 19% of adults experience some form of functional difficulties. In rural areas, demographics have higher disability rates (19.6%) than their urban counterparts (18.4%). The Disability Data Initiative reported the prevalence of certain difficulties that affected sight (11.7%), mobility (6.6%), hearing (4.45%), and cognitive capabilities (4.43%).²⁶ The prevalence of these difficulties require assistance in day to day life, especially civic participation. Without accessible information formats, disabled citizens will continue to lack the civil rights their non-disabled counterparts benefit from.

The African Disability Protocol,²⁷ ratified by Mali in 2021, is a regional framework that challenges barriers in political participation and harmful cultural practices which also complies with international standards, though implementation is unseen. The ADP obligated the Malian government to recognize sign language, enable accessible digital technologies, which has not been enacted as government websites and online services are not accessible.²⁸ Later, the Malian government signed the Social Decree into law, which aimed at enhancing services by mandating sign language and braille materials in government communications. Similarly, the Malian radio and television office created sign language interpretation in their news broadcasts, but it was not

²⁴ *African Disability Rights Yearbook*:
<https://doi.org/10.29053/2413-7138/2019/v7a8>

²⁵ *National Report on the Situation of Women with Disabilities in Mali, 2020*:
<https://gcap.global/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/LNWB-Mali-Country-Report.pdf>

²⁶ *Disability Data Initiative*:
<https://www.disabilitydatainitiative.org/country-briefs/ml/>

²⁷ *Inklusion Leben*:
<https://inklusion-leben.org/en/a-milestone-in-disability-rights-in-africa-entry-into-force-of-the-african-disability-protocol-2/>

²⁸ *United Nations Digital Library*:
https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3883174/files/CRPD_C_MLI_1-EN.pdf?ln=fr

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effective because it was not broadly implemented. Electoral laws do not require that polling stations adhere to specific accessibility standards. On the other hand, the Malian government supported initiatives towards furthering the involvement of PWDs like a partnership with the Malian Federation of People with disabilities (FEMAPH) and several other organizations to conduct inclusive voter registration through visually accessible formats for PWDs like sign language and pictograms.

We urge the Committee to ask: **What concrete steps will the delegation take to implement the African Disability Protocol’s provisions on accessible information and political participation, including ensuring polling station accessibility and mandating inclusive electoral communication formats?**

Equal political participation requires accessible communication and infrastructure. We urge the Committee to recommend that Mali enact legally binding electoral accessibility standards, mandating that all voter education materials, ballots, and polling stations accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities. These standards should require the use of sign language interpretation, Braille ballots, audio formats, tactile voting devices, and accessible digital platforms. The Committee should also encourage Mali to allocate specific funding to local governments for accessible voter outreach in rural areas and to institutionalize partnerships with OPDs—such as FEMAPH—in the design and monitoring of all electoral processes.

Limited Accessibility of Government Websites and Digital Public Services

As of 2024, Mali ranks 141st out of 193 countries in the United Nations e-Government Development Index (EGDI), improving from their ranking in 2020 at 171.²⁹ Mali’s digital divide is inevitable as internet access is primarily concentrated in urban centers such as Bamako³⁰ and the country rates are low compared to international standards for connectivity and access to digital services. In 2023, only 30% of the Malian population had access to 3G network coverage and 47% lacked 4G coverage.³¹ According to the GSMA 2021 report on Mobile Disability Gaps, 16% of people with disabilities use the internet in Africa.³² Barriers such as illiteracy and poverty

²⁹ *We are Tech Africa:*

<https://www.wearetech.africa/en/fils-uk/news/tech/mali-launches-digital-platform-to-streamline-services-for-its-diaspora>

³⁰ *The World Bank:*

<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/631931626354396324/pdf/Concept-Project-Information-Document-PI-D-Mali-Digital-Transformation-Project-PI176174.pdf>

³¹ *Extensia:*

<https://extensia.tech/mali-72-million-to-improve-access-to-telecom-services-by-2025/>

³² *VerovaAfrica:*

which remain high within poorer populations hinder the accessibility of assistive technologies and services.³³

In 2021, the Law of Social Protection was signed into law, protecting the rights of PWDs through correcting present legal deficiencies and making employment, education, and social benefits accessible. In the same year, the country ratified the African Disability Protocol which obligates the government to recognize sign language, create accessible digital technologies, which is insufficient as government websites and online services are not accessible. The government also implemented initiatives centralized to digital accessibility. In 2020, the digital Mali 202 strategy launches to prioritise the growth of the country's potential; the initiative was weak, as poor mandates and coordination hindered the potential of the strategy. However, in an attempt to modernize public administration, Mali launched a civil management software and an integrated human resources management system to create easy access to documents remotely. The government also implemented affirmative action policies in order to encourage PWDs involvement in civil services which resulted in the employment of around 150 PWDs.³⁴

However barriers still exist, as Mali's foundational challenges are a consequence of a range of limitations. Mali's existing digital skills gap is accredited to barriers relating to illiteracy and a lack of an understanding of the benefits of information communication and technology in the growth of the economy.³⁵ Additionally, the lack of human and financial resources in the implementation of legal frameworks and policies through working mechanisms to ensure implementation results in the lack of accessibility among PWDs.³⁶ But, factors that increase insecurity such as the limited access to electricity, low population density, and prominent rurality impact the physical and digital infrastructure that has yet to develop.³⁷

<https://www.verivafrika.com/insights/the-state-of-digital-inclusion-in-africa-challenges-and-disability-inclusion-as-a-solution>

³³*VerovaAfrica:*

<https://www.verivafrika.com/insights/the-state-of-digital-inclusion-in-africa-challenges-and-disability-inclusion-as-a-solution>

³⁴*Sida:*

<https://cdn.sida.se/app/uploads/2021/05/07125815/rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-mali.pdf>

³⁵*ICT Works:*

<https://www.ictworks.org/six-business-models-increase-internet-access-mali/>

³⁶*Extensia:*

<https://extensia.tech/mali-72-million-to-improve-access-to-telecom-services-by-2025/>

³⁷*World Bank:*

<https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/61714f214ed04bcd6e9623ad0e215897-0400012021/related/Mali-Country-Diagnostic.pdf>

The absence of an accessibility of government websites and digital public services in Mali perpetuates exclusion of PWDs and other vulnerable groups as essential services are barred.³⁸ Limited digital accessibility costs essential access to services such as healthcare and social benefits like democratic participation.³⁹

We urge the Committee to ask: **What measures will the delegation adopt to ensure full digital accessibility of government websites and online public services, particularly in light of its obligations under the African Disability Protocol and the 2021 Law of Social Protection?**

Digital exclusion is a growing barrier to civic participation, access to services, and economic opportunity for persons with disabilities. We urge the Committee to recommend that Mali adopt and enforce a National Digital Accessibility Standard, aligned with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), requiring all government websites and online services to be fully accessible. This should be accompanied by targeted investment in digital literacy training for persons with disabilities, increased availability of assistive technologies, and the expansion of internet infrastructure in rural regions. The Committee should further encourage the establishment of a multi-stakeholder oversight mechanism, including OPDs, to monitor compliance and guide inclusive implementation.

Inadequate Recognition and Promotion of Sign Language

Mali's inadequate recognition and promotion of sign language raises significant challenges for 40,000-70,000 estimated deaf individuals.⁴⁰ Meningitis is a primary cause of deafness in Mali, with one medical study finding 76% of participants have non congenital deafness, meningitis a leading cause. Because Mali lies on the meningitis belt, the country experiences episodic outbreaks.⁴¹ Though there has been improvement with the MenAfriVac vaccine suppressing serogroup A, a form of bacterial meningitis, the emergence of newer serogroups continues the epidemic's behavior. Due to the prevalence of the devastating disease,

³⁸United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security:

<https://www.un.org/humansecurity/hsprogramme/digital-innovation-for-sustainable-healthcare-and-social-protection-in-mali/>

³⁹Internews:

<https://internews.org/story/women-living-with-disabilities-rise-to-fame-in-the-malian-media-amid-their-obstacles/>

⁴⁰Joshua Project:

https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/19007/ML

⁴¹PAMJ:

<https://doi.org/10.11604/pamj.2021.39.57.17629>

many deaf individuals are insufficiently represented because of the inadequate promotion of sign language, leading to barriers in education, employment and inclusion.⁴²

The country's deaf population primarily uses American Sign Language (ASL) and Malian Sign Language (Langue des Signes Malienne or LSM). The use of ASL, adapted into French, was used primarily in schools for deaf children. But, LSM is primarily used by deaf individuals with no formal education,⁴³ creating a stark linguistic divide among deaf individuals. But, LSM is classified as an endangered language,⁴⁴ which poses a risk as deaf Malians switch ASL to interact with formally educated signers. The establishment of deaf education in Mali was relatively late in comparison to neighboring countries, as the first school for deaf children, the École pour les Déficiants Auditifs (EDA), was founded in 1993. The total number of educational centers for deaf children is approximately eight, which is insufficient to serve the large deaf population. As of 2025, there is no official recognition of any sign language by the Malian government nor is there any support, protection, or incorporation of sign language in any national policy or legal framework.⁴⁵

Though the Malian government has taken steps to combat gaps due to weak implementation measures, none have been explicitly to recognize and promote sign language. In 2017, Mali became the sixth African country to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD⁴⁶); later in 2018, Mali adopted Law 2018-052 to protect and promote the rights of disabled Malian citizens.⁴⁷ In 2021, the Law of Social Protection, a social decree, which promised improvements in the livelihoods of PWDs and equal civil rights.⁴⁸ The decree has several provisions that benefit PWDs: greater access to

⁴² ERIC:

<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1071522>

⁴³ ERIC:

<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1071522>

⁴⁴ Endangered Language Project:

<https://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/6991>

⁴⁵ Deaf signers in the Dogon, a rural area in Mali:

<https://scholarlypublications.universiteitleiden.nl/access/item:3589957/download>

⁴⁶ Sightsavers:

<https://www.sightsaversusa.org/blogs/2021/10/malis-journey-to-protect-the-rights-of-people-with-disabilities/>

⁴⁷ International Disability Alliance:

https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/documents/article_11_crp.pdf

⁴⁸ Sightsavers:

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employment, education, and social benefits;⁴⁹ increased access to public sector jobs based on skills and qualifications without examination;⁵⁰ equal access to water, sanitation, hygiene services, and development programs;⁵¹ the prioritization of accessible healthcare and the introduction of disability cards.⁵²

Additionally, the Malian government supported educational efforts in the past. In 2008, several schools for deaf children were established across several regions such as Sikasso, Koutiala, and Ségou.⁵³ Before that, there were the École pour les Déficiants Auditifs (EDA) schools which trained former deaf pupils and people from neighboring countries to become teachers for the deaf.⁵⁴ Later, in a USAID-funded project (2017-2020) that enrolled 51 disabled children into mainstream primary schools in Sikasso, with teachers and principals receiving training in sign language.⁵⁵

The weak implementation of the Malian government continues to enable educational, social, and economic obstacles that hinder the deaf participation. With only eight deaf schools in Mali, there is a severe shortage of educational facilities meant to serve an estimated deaf population of 40,000-65,000 people.⁵⁶ Many facilities lack proper resources, trained teachers, and appropriate teaching material.⁵⁷ Additionally, many deaf children, especially in rural areas,

<https://www.sightsaversusa.org/blogs/2021/10/malis-journey-to-protect-the-rights-of-people-with-disabilities/>

⁴⁹ *Sightsavers:*

<https://www.sightsaversusa.org/blogs/2021/10/malis-journey-to-protect-the-rights-of-people-with-disabilities/>

⁵⁰ *Sightsavers:*

<https://www.sightsaversusa.org/blogs/2021/10/malis-journey-to-protect-the-rights-of-people-with-disabilities/>

⁵¹ *Sightsavers:*

<https://www.sightsaversusa.org/blogs/2021/10/malis-journey-to-protect-the-rights-of-people-with-disabilities/>

⁵² *Sightsavers*

<https://www.sightsaversusa.org/blogs/2021/10/malis-journey-to-protect-the-rights-of-people-with-disabilities/>

⁵³ *African Sign Languages Resource Center:*

<https://africansignlanguagesresourcecenter.com/mali/>

⁵⁴ *African Sign Languages Resource Center:*

<https://africansignlanguagesresourcecenter.com/mali/>

⁵⁵ *USAID:*

https://2017-2020.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1860/USAID_EDU_HI_Fachsteet_September_19_Final.pdf

⁵⁶ *African Sign Languages Resource Center:*

<https://africansignlanguagesresourcecenter.com/mali/>

⁵⁷ *Relief Web:*

have no access to any type of deaf education due to geographic barriers and limited resources.⁵⁸ Without the recognition of sign language in Mali, the dominance of ASL in educational settings threatens the use of indigenous LSM.⁵⁹ A lack of standardization and recognition of LSM limits the languages development and use in official contexts.⁶⁰

The absence of adequate recognition and promotion of sign language not only hinders the communication of the deaf Malian population, but it perpetuates a cycle of educational, economic, and social consequences. The limited access of deaf education without the proper accommodation to their communication needs sustains low literacy rates among deaf individuals.⁶¹ Additionally, the notable gap in educational opportunities for deaf and hearing individuals limits future employment and the growth of social mobility.⁶² Similarly, the shift from LSM to ASL creates a disconnect between formally educated deaf individuals (ASL) and those without (LSM), who constitute the majority of the deaf Malian population.⁶³ This disconnect is perpetuated as unemployment rates skyrocket among deaf individuals due to limited education opportunities, communication barriers, and discrimination.⁶⁴ Many individuals resort to increased dependency on familial support or begging for survival, as reports indicate that many individuals with disabilities rely on begging for survival.⁶⁵ Because of these circumstances, a cycle of isolation and exclusion is mainstream socially among Malian societies,

<https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/school-hope-brings-education-malian-children-hearing-impairments>

⁵⁸ *USAID*:

https://2017-2020.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1860/USAID_EDU_HI_Fachsteet_September_19_Final.pdf

⁵⁹ *ERIC*:

<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1071522>

⁶⁰ *ERIC*:

<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1071522>

⁶¹ *ERIC*:

<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1071522>

⁶² *Internews*:

<https://internews.org/story/women-living-with-disabilities-rise-to-fame-in-the-malian-media-amid-their-obstacles/>

⁶³ *Endangered Languages Project*:

<https://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/6991>

⁶⁴ *DW*:

<https://www.dw.com/en/why-do-deaf-africans-struggle-to-access-their-rights/a-66886282>

⁶⁵ *U.S. Department of State*:

<https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/mali/>

reducing the quality of life for many PWDs.⁶⁶ This is the result of limited access to healthcare services,⁶⁷ restricted participation in civil and political life,⁶⁸ and intergenerational challenges when parents are unable to provide adequate support due to educational and economic barriers.⁶⁹

We urge the Committee to ask: **What immediate steps will the delegation take to formally recognize Malian Sign Language (LSM) as an official language and to ensure its inclusion in education, public services, and national policy frameworks?**

Without official recognition and promotion, sign language users in Mali—especially those who use LSM—continue to face entrenched barriers to education, employment, and civic life. We urge the Committee to recommend that Mali formally recognize Malian Sign Language (LSM) in national legislation, and adopt a national strategy for its protection, standardization, and promotion. This should include: integrating LSM into deaf education curricula; training public service professionals and interpreters; supporting sign language media interpretation; and providing resources to expand deaf education, especially in rural regions. Recognition must also be accompanied by legal guarantees for the use of sign language in courts, hospitals, and public institutions to prevent further social and economic exclusion of the deaf population.

The Rights of Children with Disabilities

Lack of a Comprehensive and Inclusive Legal Framework

The Malian Constitution, adopted in 1992, guarantees civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights to all citizens, but does not specifically mention persons with disabilities, let alone children with disabilities⁷⁰.

⁶⁶ *DW*:

<https://www.dw.com/en/why-do-deaf-africans-struggle-to-access-their-rights/a-66886282>

⁶⁷ *Borgen Magazine*:

<https://www.borgenmagazine.com/health-care-in-mali/>

⁶⁸ *International Disability Alliance*:

https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/documents/article_11_crp.pdf

⁶⁹ *Relief Web*:

<https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/school-hope-brings-education-malian-children-hearing-impairments>

⁷⁰ *Sida*:

<https://cdn.sida.se/app/uploads/2021/05/07125815/rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-mali.pdf>

Although certain laws issued by Mali's government vaguely address disabled persons, such as the 2018 Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the 2009 Persons with Disabilities Bill, none of these specifically address the needs of children, which results in significant protection gaps. Mali's current economic context might affect the lack of legislation in this department, but the issue should be addressed immediately, especially seeing as disabled persons make up for over 15% of the national population.⁷¹

The government has ratified the UN CRPD and its optional protocol, but has yet to work on providing inclusive national legislation and solutions to these issues. The legal framework remains fragmented and does not include children with disabilities.

Mali has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its Optional Protocol, signaling a formal commitment to the rights of persons with disabilities, including children. However, despite this obligation, Mali's national legal framework remains fragmented, and does not provide any specific information on the rights of impaired children in the country. Currently, Mali does not have a consolidated Children's Code and does not address the needs of children with disabilities, which limits impaired persons' ability to be included in the society.

This issue is of great importance and should be urgently addressed, as it impacts the lives of all impaired children in Mali. The lack of support from the government negatively affects their already challenging situation, and directly contradicts their commitment to provide equal social, economic and civil rights to all citizens.

We urge the Committee to ask: **How does the delegation plan to address the current legal and policy gaps affecting children with disabilities, and will it commit to adopting a Children's Code that explicitly protects and promotes their rights?**

The absence of legal recognition for children with disabilities in Mali's Constitution and broader legal framework creates systemic protection failures. We urge the Committee to recommend that Mali develop and adopt a comprehensive Children's Code that includes explicit provisions safeguarding the rights of children with disabilities, in line with its obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This Code should guarantee access to inclusive education, healthcare, and protection services, and be accompanied by national implementation plans, budget allocations, and child-sensitive monitoring mechanisms developed in consultation with organizations representing persons

⁷¹ Sida:

<https://cdn.sida.se/app/uploads/2021/05/07125815/rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-mali.pdf>

with disabilities and child rights advocates.

Barriers to Access: Education, Justice, and Civil Rights

Over the years, children in Mali have continued to face significant challenges that make it hard for them to adapt and feel included in school environments. Key factors such as geographical location, financial situation and lack of resources have influenced disabled persons' ability and motivation to prioritize education, leading to a silent crisis of exclusion and lost potential. The Child Protection Code (2002) does state that a child with a disability has the right to education and training to support self-care and social participation⁷², but the lack of implementation makes it impossible for children to actively engage in learning environments.

Currently, most disabled children in Mali are still out of school. Moreover, according to an article written by the Sida Organization in January 2015 on Disability Rights in Mali⁷³, the country ranks 182 out of 187 countries on the UN's Human Development Index and has a poverty rate of 46.3%, according to UNDP. This is directly correlated with a lack of basic resources, such as clean water, healthy, diverse food options and decent education opportunities. Moreover, the article states that even though there exist certain schools that are designed specifically for persons with disabilities, their capacity is limited and cannot accommodate enough people.

Although many issues in this department currently remain unsolved, several organizations have come up with initiatives to close this gap in the education sector. For example, the Sightsavers Organization⁷⁴ translated the Malian language into braille for the first time to help children with visual impairments get equal access to learning. This means that disabled children in the country can now get access to readings and school work that are translated into braille. The initiative has been implemented into various schools and has helped over 250 children with visual impairments.⁷⁵

⁷²Education Profiles:

<https://education-profiles.org/sub-saharan-africa/mali/~inclusion>

⁷³Sida:

<https://cdn.sida.se/app/uploads/2021/05/07125815/rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-mali.pdf>

⁷⁴SightSavers:

<https://www.sightsavers.org/stories/2021/05/inclusive-education-mali/#:~:text=In%20Mali%2C%20children%20with%20disabilities,blind%20or%20have%20visual%20impairments>

⁷⁵Independent:

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/mali-duo-tour-world-to-save-blind-school-472250.html>

Even though government policy states that school is free of charge for all children, other informal fees and school related costs still make it hard for parents to afford sending their children to school. Moreover, teachers are still not properly trained and are not able to provide support to disabled students, which has proved to be another challenge that has stopped them from consistently going to school. Another key issue that has yet to be solved is transportation, as traveling long distances is often difficult for impaired persons.

From a long-term perspective, lack of education is negatively impacting Mali's ability to expand politically and strengthen international relationships with other countries, and the absence of efforts to provide disabled children with the opportunity to learn in a school will lead to negative developments of the Mali society.

We urge the Committee to ask: **What concrete steps will the delegation take to ensure the effective implementation of inclusive education policies for children with disabilities, and how will it address barriers related to transportation, teacher training, and affordability?**

Inclusive education is fundamental to breaking cycles of poverty and exclusion. We urge the Committee to recommend that Mali adopt a National Inclusive Education Strategy for children with disabilities, with measurable targets, adequate funding, and enforcement mechanisms. This strategy should include: mandatory training for teachers on inclusive pedagogy and disability awareness; subsidized transportation for students with disabilities; removal of informal school fees; and expansion of specialized support services in mainstream schools. The Committee should also encourage the government to scale up successful civil society initiatives—such as the braille literacy program supported by Sightsavers—and institutionalize them within national education policy to ensure long-term sustainability and national coverage.

Weak Implementation and Lack of Resources

Although Mali has adopted several laws and policies aligned with the CRPD, implementation is undermined by limited resources, lack of coordination, and weak monitoring mechanisms⁷⁶. The CRPD Committee, under Article 33, requires states to establish independent mechanisms to promote, protect, and monitor the implementation of the Convention, but progress in Mali has been slow and inconsistent⁷⁷. As previously stated, Mali ranks 182 out of

⁷⁶Mental Disability Advocacy Centre:

<https://www.mdac.org/en/implementing-un-convention-rights-persons-disabili>

⁷⁷Mental Disability Advocacy Centre:

<https://www.mdac.org/en/implementing-un-convention-rights-persons-disabili>

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187 countries on the UN's Human Development Index and has a poverty rate of 46.3%, according to UNDP⁷⁸, which can lead to a lack of resources in many departments.

Currently, many private organizations are trying to work on implementing programs that aid in assisting disabled children despite the lack of resources. In the Mali Cover Sheet, published in 2022⁷⁹, written by the HI organization, it is specified that several development activities have taken place in key areas of the country, such as Sikasso, Bamako, Mopti, Timbuktu and Gao. Current running projects of the organization include strengthening the capacities of service providers in detecting disabilities in children and providing clear, accurate diagnosis, as well as helping create stimulation spaces and income-generating activities for parents of children with disabilities.

Though significant challenges remain, the government has taken action to improve Mali's current lack of resources that support the disabled community, especially children. For example, through the 2025 Humanitarian Response Plan⁸⁰, the government is mobilizing substantial resources (\$771.3 million requested) to provide emergency assistance—including education, protection, and health services—to the most vulnerable populations, with a focus on women and children with disabilities, to ensure their easy access to basic, essential resources. Moreover, other targeted health and community programs have been developed by the national Ministry of Health and Social Development, such as the REACH Mali program, and other initiatives that aim to assist disabled children from marginalized areas.

Although the government seems to be working on improving the current situation, the lack of financial support from the government still makes it hard for organizations to provide assistance. However, all initiatives represent an improvement towards aligning with the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' goals and provide real support to children with impairments.

Despite these efforts, persistent barriers—such as insufficient funding, lack of qualified personnel, and ongoing insecurity—continue to limit the reach and impact of government initiatives. However, the government's increasing collaboration with international partners and focus on inclusive, participatory approaches signal a commitment to gradually overcoming these

⁷⁸*Sida:*

<https://cdn.sida.se/app/uploads/2021/05/07125815/rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-mali.pdf>

⁷⁹*Fiche Pays MALI:*

https://www.hi-us.org/sn_uploads/federation/country/pdf/2022-12-Country-Sheet-External-Long-MALI-EN.pdf ‘

⁸⁰*UNOCHA:*

<https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/mali/launch-2025-humanitarian-response-plan-mali-7713-million-required-provide-life-saving-assistance-and-protection-services-47-million-people>

challenges, which is essential, seeing as this key issue affects a big part of the country's population.

We urge the Committee to ask: **How does the delegation plan to ensure that ongoing humanitarian and development programs—such as the 2025 Humanitarian Response Plan—adequately include and prioritize children with disabilities in both design and implementation?**

Humanitarian and development programs must be inclusive by design. We urge the Committee to recommend that Mali create a national disability-inclusive development framework that mandates the inclusion of children with disabilities in all humanitarian, education, health, and protection programs. This framework should include disability-specific budgeting requirements, data collection disaggregated by age and disability, and mandatory involvement of representative OPDs and families of children with disabilities in program planning and monitoring. The Committee should also advocate for the expansion of early childhood intervention services—including disability screening, assistive technologies, and parental support programs—especially in underserved regions like Gao, Mopti, and Timbuktu.

Electoral Barriers for Persons with Disabilities

Legal Disenfranchisement of Persons with Intellectual or Psychosocial Disabilities

In Mali, people struggling with disabilities continue to face serious challenges when it comes to political participation, specifically engaging in the voting process. Despite the legislative advancements carried out by Mali's government, Mali has yet to change the reality of their situation.

In 2021, Prime Minister Choguel Kokalla Maiga signed a decree of implementation related to the Law of Social Protection and passed it into law. This law promises improvements to the lives of people with disabilities and will make it possible for people to claim their rights. For example, it will give people with disabilities greater access to employment, education, and social benefits. Mali's new constitution, adopted in 2023, emphasizes respect for the human rights of persons with disabilities as enshrined in international treaties signed and ratified by the country.⁸¹

⁸¹*Sight Savers*:

www.sightsaversusa.org/news/2021/09/mali-passes-law-to-protect-rights-of-people-with-disabilities/

These laws in place to ensure the protection of persons with disabilities are misleading. Even though there has been action taken in a legal manner, the de facto reality of the situation is that the practices adopted during elections do not properly accommodate persons with disabilities. There is no clear support system or resources available to aid disabled persons in their natural civic right to vote.⁸²

During elections, there are a lot of barriers to success. For instance, many polling stations lack ramps, which makes it hard or impossible for people who use wheelchairs to enter. There is also no accommodation for the blind, as Mali does not provide braille ballots. To add on, the Malian government does not plan arrangements for persons with intellectual disabilities.⁸³ Finally, the laws in place do not outline whether people under legal guardianship can vote. The vague language discourages the idea, and many people with disabilities just don't vote at all.

To make matters worse, voter information is often not accessible either. Things like flyers, instructions, or even candidate platforms are usually only in standard written formats. There aren't audio recordings, no large print, no simple language and this causes a lot of exclusion. The people running elections don't get training on how to accommodate disabled voters, which creates even more confusion and lack of participation among the population.⁸⁴

We urge the Committee to ask: **What steps will the delegation take to guarantee that electoral processes—including polling station accessibility, voting materials, and legal clarity—uphold the rights of persons with disabilities to vote independently and confidentially?**

The right to vote must be equally protected for all citizens. We urge the Committee to recommend that Mali adopt and enforce comprehensive electoral accessibility regulations that mandate inclusive voting procedures. These should include the provision of Braille ballots, tactile voting templates, polling station accessibility standards (e.g., ramps and wide entrances), and the use of plain-language and audio voter education materials. Additionally, the

⁸²*Sight Savers*:

www.sightsavers.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Disability-inclusive-elections-in-Africa-a-qualitative-systematic-review.pdf

⁸³*Sight Savers*:

www.sightsavers.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Disability-inclusive-elections-in-Africa-a-qualitative-systematic-review.pdf

⁸⁴*Sight Savers*:

www.sightsavers.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Disability-inclusive-elections-in-Africa-a-qualitative-systematic-review.pdf

electoral code must clearly affirm the voting rights of persons under guardianship, and training should be required for all election workers on disability inclusion to ensure that legal reforms translate into meaningful participation at the ballot box..

Limited Political Representation at the National Level

Persons with disabilities in Mali are noticeably underrepresented in national politics, despite making up a significant part of the total population. In Mali, 15.5% of the population, around 2.2 million people, live with a disability. This creates a great injustice within the Malian government, as a large division of the Malian population doesn't have a voice in their own administration.

The country has taken some steps toward disability inclusion (the law established by Prime Minister Choguel Kokalla Maiga referenced earlier). However, as mentioned previously, these changes haven't been translated into actual political reformation and presence for disabled citizens in government roles. There are very few, if any at all, elected officials with disabilities in Mali's National Assembly or high-ranking decision-making positions.⁸⁵ This creates an environment where people with disabilities do not have representation for or opinions on issues that affect their daily lives.

One of the largest barriers is the lack of legal or institutional mechanisms to support the political involvement of disabled people. Mali does not have any formal quota system to ensure proper representation for persons with disabilities in national or local political structures. Other African countries, like Uganda and Kenya, have introduced quotas or reserved seats, but Mali has yet to take initiative.⁸⁶ Without these kinds of frameworks, disabled candidates face enormous challenges. There is a lack of funding for disabled candidates, inaccessible campaign platforms, and a great social stigma that discourages disabled persons from participating in the political process altogether.

Despite Mali ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), implementation of the legislation remains weak. Article 29 calls for the full participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life, but Mali has struggled to

⁸⁵*Sight Savers:*

www.sightsaversusa.org/news/2021/09/mali-passes-law-to-protect-rights-of-people-with-disabilities/

⁸⁶*Sight Savers:*

<https://www.sightsavers.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Disability-inclusive-elections-in-Africa-a-qualitative-systematic-review.pdf>

meet this obligation in a meaningful manner.⁸⁷ People with disabilities are usually left out of consultations on policy, and few efforts are made to encourage or support them to run for office. This results in policies that overlook accessibility, disability rights, and inclusion. People with disabilities aren't in the room to aid in that decision-making, which violates their equal rights to participation.

We urge the Committee to ask: **What concrete steps will the delegation take to promote the political participation of persons with disabilities, including the establishment of mechanisms such as quotas, funding support, or accessibility requirements for electoral campaigns?**

Representation in decision-making spaces is essential to ensuring inclusive and responsive governance. We urge the Committee to recommend that Mali adopt a national framework to strengthen political representation of persons with disabilities, including the introduction of reserved seats or candidate quotas at national and local levels, as practiced in countries like Uganda and Kenya. The framework should also provide public funding for disabled candidates, mandate accessible campaign communication, and ensure OPD consultation in political reform processes. Without institutional mechanisms to reduce stigma and create opportunity, persons with disabilities will continue to be excluded from shaping the policies that directly impact their lives.

Accessibility Setbacks During Elections Amid Political Instability

In Mali's most recent elections, the combination of political turbulence and weak infrastructure has made voting especially difficult for disabled persons. The political instability, caused by coups in both 2020 and 2021, has disrupted electoral timelines and diverted governmental attention away from disability rights. This has caused significant time lag in the development of enforcing disability rights.⁸⁸

Due to all the political turmoil, elections have been postponed, and a military-led transitional administration has been overused in place of a real one. The lack of a stable government has caused little to no effort to remain dedicated to the proper accommodation of disabled persons.

⁸⁷United Nations:

www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html

⁸⁸Freedom House:

freedomhouse.org/country/mali/freedom-world/2023

Polling stations are not physically accessible, they aren't equipped with ramps or staffed with aides to support disabled voters.⁸⁹ During the 2020 parliamentary polls, violence and kidnappings severely affected turnout, there was only 12% in the capital, while polling stations in rural areas were even less accommodating toward voters. This caused a large amount of distrust and discouraged disabled voters (specifically those with mobility challenges) from participating at all.⁹⁰

Finally, the programs put in place in order to ensure that the election processes are carried out adequately prioritize security over inclusion. Training offered by UNITAR to election managers lacks any focus on the issue of disabled voters.⁹¹ As a result of all this, disabled Malians are left facing a perfect storm of barriers: unsafe conditions, inaccessible polling stations, and no legal guarantees or support systems in place. If Mali wants to uphold democratic principles and protect the rights of all citizens, it must stabilize politically and enforce accessibility standards in every election cycle.

We urge the Committee to ask: **How will the delegation ensure that future elections are both secure and accessible for persons with disabilities, particularly in light of recent political instability and the absence of inclusion-focused training and infrastructure?**

Security and inclusion must go hand in hand in any democratic process. We urge the Committee to recommend that Mali integrate disability inclusion into all electoral preparedness and security planning frameworks, ensuring that emergency or transitional governments do not suspend obligations under the CRPD. The government should adopt binding standards requiring polling stations to be physically accessible, deploy trained aides to assist disabled voters, and embed disability rights modules into all election official training programs—including those provided by UNITAR. In addition, voter outreach efforts must prioritize persons with disabilities in both urban and rural areas, especially in conflict-affected regions where trust and turnout have declined most severely.

⁸⁹ *Wikipedia*:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Mali

⁹⁰ *Wikipedia*:
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2020_Malian_protests

⁹¹ *Unitar*:
[unitar.org/sites/default/files/media/file/Final%20independent%20evaluation%20report%20-%20Elections%20Mali.p
df](https://unitar.org/sites/default/files/media/file/Final%20independent%20evaluation%20report%20-%20Elections%20Mali.pdf)

Insufficient Government Support for Inclusive Political Participation Initiatives

In Mali, efforts to make political participation more inclusive for people with disabilities have often fallen short due to a lack of strong and consistent government support. While the laws introduced in 2021 have demonstrated positive progress, the implementation around them has been slow and underfunded. There are few visible results in terms of actual inclusion in the political process. Without support programs and government funding, disabled persons are left with little to no encouragement to participate civically, reducing turnout.

There is an extreme lack of legal or institutional mechanisms to support the political involvement of disabled people. Government-run programs meant to promote civic engagement rarely consider accessibility, and national election strategies don't prioritize the needs of disabled voters or candidates.⁹²

There are no dedicated government bodies tasked with monitoring or enforcing inclusive political participation. Civil society organizations or non-profits are left to fill the gap, and the entities often lack resources or political backing. International agreements like the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities (CRPD), as mentioned prior, obligate the country to promote full participation in public and political life. Yet, the government has not constructed a detailed plan for fulfilling these responsibilities.⁹³ Instead, much of the work on disability inclusion is left to NGOs. While they are committed, they cannot take the place of state-level accountability.

Without direct investment in inclusive training for election workers, funding for accessible materials, and active outreach to encourage political participation by disabled citizens, meaningful inclusion will remain out of reach. As long as the government treats disability as a social issue rather than a political priority, people with disabilities in Mali will continue to be sidelined during elections and excluded from shaping national policy.

We urge the Committee to ask: **What steps will the delegation take to establish a dedicated national body responsible for promoting and monitoring the political participation of persons with disabilities, and to ensure sufficient funding and institutional support for**

⁹² *Sida:*

cdn.sida.se/app/uploads/2021/05/07125815/rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-mali.pdf

⁹³ *United Nations:*

www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html

inclusive electoral processes?

Meaningful political participation requires more than legal commitments—it demands state-led action. We urge the Committee to recommend that Mali establish a government-backed National Office for Inclusive Civic Participation, tasked with coordinating electoral accessibility efforts, developing voter outreach campaigns targeting persons with disabilities, and ensuring CRPD-compliant election strategies. This office should work in partnership with OPDs and civil society to provide inclusive training for election officials, develop accessible materials in various formats (e.g., Braille, plain language, sign language), and monitor turnout and participation data disaggregated by disability. Long-term public funding must be allocated to guarantee that inclusion is sustained, not sidelined.

Conclusion

The rights of persons with disabilities in Mali cannot be addressed through isolated reforms or symbolic legislation. Disability rights are inherently multifaceted—intersecting with education, health, transportation, political participation, digital access, and social protection. While Mali has made commendable legal strides by ratifying the CRPD and the African Disability Protocol, the implementation of these frameworks remains fragmented, underfunded, and lacking coordination. Legal reforms alone cannot guarantee change; they must be translated into tangible, inclusive policies that reach the everyday lives of the 15.5% of Malians living with disabilities.

To truly uphold the principles of equality and inclusion, Mali must adopt a comprehensive, cross-sectoral national strategy for disability rights—one that includes the establishment of independent oversight bodies, national accessibility standards, inclusive education systems, and targeted political participation mechanisms

This report may be published on the CRPD webpage to the general public. Direct enquiries to admin@accessibilityatlas.org. This report was authored by Dinu Antonescu, Manasareddy Sanivarapu, Thomas Mathew, Charles Miles Agle, Antonia Gouvis, Vedansh Garg, Antonia Tarfulea and Eric Octavian.