

# GUINEA-BISSAU

Ana Carolina Figueiró Longo\* & Tatiana Reinehr de Oliveira\*\*

## Summary

*According to the United Nations (UN), the population of Guinea-Bissau is estimated to be 1.8 million. There has not been a recent census on persons with disabilities. In Guinea-Bissau, disability affects an estimated 0,94 per cent of the population (a significantly underreported figure compared to global estimates) with significant challenges related to poverty, conflict and lack of access to basic services. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the most prevalent forms of disabilities include deep-seated prejudice and negative social norms (linking disability to curses), limited access to essential services (for example, 59 per cent school non-attendance among youth with disabilities), poverty, and exposure to harmful traditional practices and ritualistic violence. Guinea-Bissau signed and ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its Optional Protocol in 2014 and 2018, respectively. The Guinea-Bissau Constitution (articles 15, 16, 24) addresses disability indirectly through provisions on equality and access to health/education and directly references incapacity for work in social security (article 46(3)). However, the Draft Basic Law for the Protection, Promotion, and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities is currently pending. Furthermore, Guinea-Bissau does not have an official body specifically tasked with combatting violations of the rights of persons with disabilities, but the National Commission for Human Rights and Citizenship (CNDHC) can indirectly address these issues.*

*The difficulties and challenges related to the legal and institutional framework have been partly resolved with adoption of the National Strategy for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities (2023) and the National Strategic Plan for Inclusive Education (2023), and also by the creation and operationalisation of a department for the sector in the Ministry for Women, Family and Social Solidarity (MFMSS). In addition, Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) are critical in advocacy and filling service gaps.*

*The most urgent problems that need to be addressed progressively to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities include lack of awareness of the Convention and the National Disability Act, lack of an appropriate legal/judicial framework in accordance with the Convention; and lack of political will/interest/capacity.*

\* PhD candidate in Law and Public Policy, LL.M. in Constitutional Law (Brazilian Institute of Public Law); Professor of Human Rights in the undergraduate Law Programme at CEUB, mother of Gabriel and Thais.

\*\* PhD in Law and Public Policy (CEUB/PDSE Paris 1 – Sorbonne), visiting professor at the Post Graduate Lato Sensu Programme of CEUB.

## 1 Population indicators

### 1.1 What is the total population of Guinea-Bissau?

In 2023, the total population of Guinea-Bissau reached 1 781 308 people, with the women outnumbering the men (939 041 versus 842 267). The majority of the population, 58,3 per cent, are concentrated in rural areas, as opposed to 47,6 per cent living in urban areas. SAB, Oio and Gabu are the most populated areas, representing, 25,2 per cent, 14,9 per cent and 14,2 per cent of the total population, respectively.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.2 Describe the methodology used to obtain the statistical data on the prevalence of disability in Guinea-Bissau. What criteria are used to determine who falls within the class of persons with disabilities in Guinea-Bissau?

The process of collecting statistical data on disability prevalence in Guinea-Bissau followed a structured and collaborative methodology, engaging both governmental institutions and civil society. It began with training sessions for ministry representatives on reporting under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).<sup>2</sup> A working group then carried out consultations with various ministries, including Health, Education, Justice, and Public Works, as well as national bodies such as the National Institute of Statistics and the Motor Rehabilitation Centre. Civil society organisations (CSOs), including the Federation of Associations for the Defence and Promotion of the Rights of People with Disabilities and the National Association of the Deaf, were also involved. After forming a five-member working group, additional consultations were held with civil society (9 September 2024), followed by a validation meeting with nearly all ministries (8 October 2024), ensuring a governmental endorsement of the report.

The criteria for defining persons with disabilities in Guinea-Bissau are multifaceted, drawing from constitutional provisions, international conventions, and practical considerations in social protection. Although no single legal instrument exists, the country follows the CRPD definition, emphasising long-term disabilities and societal barriers. National studies have identified typologies such as visual, hearing, physical, intellectual, psychosocial, and motor disabilities. Functional capacity and socio-economic factors also play a role, particularly regarding eligibility for welfare programmes. Moreover, cultural norms and social perceptions significantly influence the recognition of disability, often reinforcing discrimination and exclusion. Thus, Guinea-Bissau adopts a holistic understanding that integrates medical, functional, and social dimensions.

1 World Health Organisation (WHO) 'Country profile: Guinea Bissau' (2025) <https://www.who.int/about/accountability/results/who-results-report-2024-2025/country-profile/2024/guinea-bissau> (accessed 27 October 2025).

2 CRPD, Initial Report submitted by Guinea Bissau under article 35 of the Convention, due in 2016, 5 December 2024, UN Doc CRPD/C/GNB/1 (2024) <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2120515.html> (accessed 27 October 2025).

### 1.3 What is the total number and percentage of persons with disabilities in Guinea-Bissau?

The last National Census in Guinea-Bissau, carried out in 2009, recorded 13 590 persons with disabilities, representing 0,94 per cent of the population. However, the lack of updated research for over more than 14 years has created significant data gaps.<sup>3</sup> A nationwide mapping initiative conducted in 2020-2021 by the Federation of Associations for the Defence and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) support, identified 11 548 persons with disabilities across all regions. The results showed regional disparities, with Oio registering the highest number (2 172 people, 19 per cent) and Bolama-Bijagós the lowest (490 people, four per cent). Although the mapping process, carried out by 100 trained surveyors, provided valuable insights – especially during the COVID-19 response – some areas remained uncovered due to logistical constraints.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.4 What is the total number and percentage of women with disabilities in Guinea-Bissau?

In Guinea-Bissau, according to the 2009 Census, there were 6 265 women with disabilities, representing 46,1 per cent of the total population with disabilities. Furthermore, according to the Federation of Associations for the Defence and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of Guinea-Bissau's database on persons with disabilities in Guinea-Bissau, conducted in 2021, among those with registered disabilities, 5 378 (46 per cent) are female.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.5 What is the total number and percentage of children with disabilities in Guinea-Bissau?

Although recent official reports did not provide a total count of children with disabilities, a 2021 study by the Federation of Associations for the Defence and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Guinea-Bissau revealed that approximately 16 per cent of children between the ages of five and 17 were living with some form of disability.<sup>6</sup>

### 1.6 What are the most prevalent forms of disability and/or peculiarities to disability in Guinea-Bissau?

According to the study conducted by the National Institute for Study and Research (INEP) in 2009, specific identified typologies of disability included partial visual disability; hearing disability; physical disability, particularly of the lower limbs; intellectual and psychosocial disability; and motor disability. A peculiarity to disability in Guinea-Bissau is its relation to the country's chronic instability since independence in 1974, which has contributed to persistent poverty. As of September 2023, a significant portion of the population lives in poverty, with 64,4

3 UNDP 'Launch of database of persons with disabilities in Guinea Bissau' 9 August 2021 <https://www.undp.org/guinea-bissau/news/launch-database-persons-disabilities-guinea-bissau> (accessed 27 October 2025).

4 As above.

5 As above.

6 I Suvillaga 'Fighting disability and poverty in Guinea Bissau' The Borgen Project (5 September 2025) <https://borgenproject.org/fighting-disability-and-poverty-in-guinea-bissau/> (accessed 27 October 2025).

per cent of citizens subsisting below the poverty line. In addition, 68 per cent are unable to afford a healthy and nutritious diet. This challenging environment is particularly arduous for children and adults with disabilities, who encounter significant barriers exacerbated by prevalent prejudice and negative social norms.<sup>7</sup>

## 2 Guinea-Bissau's international obligations

### 2.1 What is the status of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in Guinea-Bissau? Has Guinea-Bissau signed and ratified the CRPD? Provide the date(s).

Guinea-Bissau has made a formal commitment to the CRPD by ratifying both the Convention and its Optional Protocol on 24 September 2014 and 22 October 2018, respectively. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, international legal instruments, including human rights treaties, have direct applicability and immediate effect within the domestic legal system once they enter into force. This means that the CRPD's principles are integrated directly into the country's legal framework. Despite this legal progress, the state still faces significant challenges in fully incorporating the rights of persons with disabilities into specific public and macro-economic policies, largely due to ongoing political instability.<sup>8</sup>

### 2.2 If Guinea-Bissau has signed and ratified the CRPD, when is/was its country report due? Which government department is responsible for submission of the report? Has Guinea-Bissau submitted its report? If not, what reason does the relevant government department give for the delay?

Although Guinea-Bissau ratified the CRPD to reinforce its commitment to protecting disability rights, the state has struggled to translate its principles into effective public and macro-economic policies. On 5 December 2024, the country submitted its Initial Report under article 35 of the CRPD – originally due in 2016 – through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, following the work of an inter-ministerial group and approval by the Minister for Women, Family and Social Solidarity. While acknowledging progress in fulfilling international obligations, Guinea-Bissau continues to face serious challenges, particularly in a context of widespread poverty. Data from the National Statistics Institute (2009) shows that 33 per cent of the population lives in extreme poverty, and 69 per cent in relative poverty, conditions that disproportionately affect persons with disabilities by limiting access to education, employment, and social inclusion.<sup>9</sup>

Disability demographics further illustrate structural challenges: while the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that 16 per cent of the global population lives with a disability, Guinea-Bissau's 2009 Census reported only 0,94 per cent.<sup>10</sup> This discrepancy reflects the need for updated research and more effective data collection methodologies. To address this, the upcoming 2025

7 As above.

8 Initial Report (n 2).

9 As above.

10 As above.

General Census will introduce new questions aligned with CRPD principles to produce more accurate national statistics. Despite data inconsistencies, reports highlight that women are the main victims of violence in Guinea-Bissau, and women with disabilities are even more vulnerable, facing higher rates of abuse compared to women without disabilities

**2.3 While reporting under various other UN instruments, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, or the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, has Guinea-Bissau also reported specifically on the rights of persons with disabilities in its most recent reports? If so, were concluding observations adopted? If relevant, were these observations given effect to? Was mention made of disability rights in Guinea-Bissau's UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR)? If so, what was the effect of these observations/recommendations?**

Regarding other instruments, according to the Report on the Right to Health in Guinea Bissau, from April 2017, the country has ratified: the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) – 1 November 2010, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) – 23 August 1985, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) – 20 August 1990, and the CRPD – 24 September 2014.

Guinea-Bissau submitted its Report on the Implementation of the CRPD in December 2024. In addition, it submitted its Combined Fifth and Sixth Periodic Reports on the Implementation of the CRC in May 2024. The State Report of Guinea-Bissau for the 4th Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) also refers to the rights of persons with disabilities and highlights the country's efforts and challenges in this area.<sup>11</sup>

As part of the United Nations Human Rights Council's UPR conducted in January 2015, Guinea-Bissau received 151 recommendations. Among them was a request that the country ratify human rights treaties aimed at protecting persons with disabilities and take the necessary measures to prevent ritual killings of children with disabilities, including investigating and prosecuting suspects and intensifying efforts to eliminate such practices.<sup>12</sup> In 2022, Guinea-Bissau adopted a national human rights strategy and action plan, fulfilling a previous commitment.<sup>13</sup>

Guinea-Bissau has demonstrated its commitment to human rights through various legal actions and legislative developments. It ratified the Optional Protocol to the CRPD on 22 October 2018. However, the country has not yet ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa.

11 SF Imbunde 'Reflections on physical disability in the family environment in Guinea-Bissau' Final Course Work, Bachelor's Degree in Pedagogy, Institute of Humanities and Letters of Malês, University of International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony, São Francisco do Conde, 2023 <https://repositorio.unilab.edu.br/jspui/handle/123456789/3560> (accessed 27 October 2025).

12 Office of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea Bissau 'Realising the human rights of children with disabilities must be a priority' (2015) <https://uniogbis.unmissions.org/en/node/100041373> (accessed 27 October 2025).

13 Imbunde (n 11).

Additionally, Guinea-Bissau has ratified several other significant international legal instruments concerning children's rights, including the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the CRC; both Conventions incorporate provisions relevant to the rights of children with disabilities.<sup>14</sup>

**2.4 Was there any domestic effect on Guinea-Bissau's legal system after ratifying the international or regional instrument in 2.3 above? Does the international or regional instrument that has been ratified require Guinea-Bissau's legislature to incorporate it into the legal system before the instrument can have force in Guinea-Bissau's domestic law? Have Guinea-Bissau's courts ever considered this question? If so, cite the case(s).**

The ratification of the CRPD in 2014 provided a framework for Guinea-Bissau to adopt laws and policies aimed at protecting and promoting the rights of persons with disabilities. However, the practical implementation of these commitments has been limited, and many initiatives remain pending. Recent reporting and reviews have highlighted the following domestic legislative developments:

- **Labour Code** – Act 07/2022, currently in force, establishes labour protections relevant to persons with disabilities.<sup>15</sup>
- **Code for the Comprehensive Protection of Children** – awaiting adoption by the National People's Assembly, with provisions relevant to children with disabilities.
- **Revisions to the Civil Code, Code of Civil Procedure, Criminal Code, and Code of Criminal Procedure** – pending approval, aimed at aligning civil and criminal legislation with human rights standards, including disability rights.
- **Draft Basic Law for the Protection, Promotion, and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities** – currently under discussion in the Council of Ministers and awaiting submission to the National People's Assembly for approval.<sup>16</sup>
- **Constitution of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau** – Articles 24 and 49 guarantee the right to education for all citizens, indirectly encompassing persons with disabilities.<sup>17</sup>
- **Basic Law on the Educational System** – Law 04/2011, provides for inclusive education and the identification of children with special educational needs.<sup>18</sup>
- **Law on the Teaching Career** – Law 02/2011, includes provisions for the recruitment and professional development of teachers addressing special educational needs.
- **Law on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)** – Law 14/2011, criminalises FGM and has led to convictions, demonstrating the judiciary's capacity to enforce specific laws.

Despite these frameworks, reports indicate that the domestic effect of the CRPD remains limited. The ratification has not yet resulted in widespread integration of disability rights into public and macro-economic policies, and enforcement of

14 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 'UPR – Guinea-Bissau' (2025) <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/gw-index> (accessed 27 October 2025).

15 F Cá 'Public policies for inclusion and access to education for people with disabilities (PWD) in Bissau/Guinea-Bissau' Undergraduate Public Administration Course, Institute of Applied Social Sciences, University of International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony, Redenção-Ceará, 2023 <https://repositorio.unilab.edu.br/jspui/handle/123456789/4784> (accessed 27 October 2025).

16 Imbunde (n 11).

17 BBVF Biague 'Constitution and human rights in Guinea-Bissau' Thesis, Department of Public Law, Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte, 2019.

18 Cá (n 15).

existing laws is uneven. The ongoing legislative initiatives, including the draft Basic Law for Persons with Disabilities, signal potential progress, but the gap between ratification,<sup>19</sup> legislation, and effective implementation remains a persistent challenge.

**2.5 With reference to 2.4 above, has the CRPD or any other ratified international instrument been domesticated? Provide details.**

Guinea-Bissau's Initial Report under article 35 of the CRPD states that the Convention, once ratified, holds supra-legal force and is directly applicable within the national legal system, taking precedence over ordinary laws. The Report also notes the ratification of other key treaties, including ICERD, the CEDAW, the CRC, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). While these instruments have been ratified, Guinea-Bissau is still harmonising its domestic legislation with international norms, as exemplified by the pending adoption of the Code for the Comprehensive Protection of Children and the ongoing revisions to the Civil, Civil Procedure, Criminal, and Criminal Procedure Codes.<sup>20</sup>

### 3 Constitution

**3.1 Does Guinea-Bissau's Constitution contain provisions that directly address disability? If so, list the provisions, and explain how each provision addresses disability.**

The Constitution of Guinea-Bissau contains provisions that directly address disability, as follows:

- **Article 5(2)(a):** this provision expresses the Republic's duty to ensure a dignified existence for 'combatants for the liberation of the Homeland', particularly those who suffered a 'physical diminution that makes them, totally or partially, incapable of work' due to their participation in the liberation struggle. This directly addresses physical disability and its impact on work capacity for a specific group.
- **Article 46(3):** this article proclaims that: 'the State shall gradually create a system capable of guaranteeing workers social security in old age, illness or when they incur incapacity for work.' This explicitly mentions 'incapacity for work' as a condition for which social security should be provided, directly acknowledging disability in the context of employment and social protection.

**3.2 Does Guinea-Bissau's Constitution contain provisions that indirectly address disability? If so, list the provisions and explain how each provision indirectly addresses disability.**

The Constitution of Guinea-Bissau also includes provisions that, while not explicitly naming disability, are relevant to its indirect recognition and protection, as listed below:

- **Article 15 (Public Health):** this article sets the objective of public health as promoting the physical and mental well-being of the population and their balanced

19 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (n 14).

20 Initial Report (n 2).

integration into the socio-ecological environment. While not explicitly mentioning disability, access to healthcare and well-being are fundamental for persons with disabilities.

- **Article 16 (Education):** this provision states that education aims at human formation, providing qualifications, knowledge, and values for integration into the community. This general right to education applies to all citizens, including persons with disabilities, ensuring their access to learning and development.
- **Article 24 (Equality):** this article declares that 'all citizens are equal before the law, enjoy the same rights and are subject to the same duties, without distinction of race, sex, social, intellectual or cultural level, religious belief or philosophical conviction'. While disability is not listed, the principle of non-discrimination and equality before the law implicitly extends protection to persons with disabilities, ensuring they enjoy the same rights without distinction.
- **Article 29(1):** this provision states that 'the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution do not exclude any others contained in the other laws of the Republic and the applicable rules of international law'. This opens the door for the application of international human rights instruments, such as the CRPD, which specifically detail the rights of persons with disabilities, thus indirectly reinforcing those rights within the national legal framework.
- **Article 29(2):** this article mandates that constitutional and legal precepts relating to fundamental rights 'must be interpreted in harmony with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights'. Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) includes the right to a standard of living adequate for health and wellbeing and specifically mentions 'disability' as a condition for which security is guaranteed. This provides an interpretative lens that includes disability rights.
- **Article 32 (Access to Justice):** this provision affirms the right of every citizen to have recourse to judicial bodies against acts that violate their rights, ensuring justice is not denied due to lack of economic means. This right is crucial for persons with disabilities to seek redress for any violations of their rights.
- **Article 37 (Integrity of the Person):** this article states that 'the moral and physical integrity of citizens is inviolable' and prohibits torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. These protections are fundamental for all individuals, including persons with disabilities, who may be at a higher risk of such abuses.

## 4 Legislation

### 4.1 Does Guinea-Bissau have legislation that directly addresses disability? If so, list the legislation and explain how the legislation addresses disability.

Guinea-Bissau does not yet have a comprehensive, standalone national law specifically addressing all disability issues. However, disability rights are partially protected through ratified international treaties and existing national laws. The main instruments currently in force include:

- **CRPD** (ratified 2014): holds supra-legal force and is directly applicable within the national legal system; serves as the principal instrument for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities.
- **Draft Basic Law for the Protection, Promotion, and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities:** Currently pending but once adopted it will be the first comprehensive national law dedicated exclusively to persons with disabilities.<sup>21</sup> Currently, there is no approved national law exclusively dedicated to persons with disabilities; the CRPD serves as the main legal instrument.

21 Imbunde (n 11).

These instruments provide partial protection and guidance for disability rights, but a comprehensive, standalone national law on disability has not yet been enacted.<sup>22</sup>

**4.2 Does Guinea-Bissau have legislation that indirectly addresses disability? If so, list the main legislation and explain how the legislation relates to disability.**

- Labour Code – Act 07/2022 – Protects workers and includes provisions relevant to the inclusion of persons with disabilities.
- Basic Education Law – Law 04/2010 – Provides for inclusive education, covering children with physical or intellectual and psychosocial disabilities.
- Law on the Teaching Career – Law 02/2011 – Establishes rights and duties for teachers addressing special educational needs.
- Constitution of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, articles 24 and 49 – Guarantees the right to education for all citizens, including persons with disabilities.
- Law on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) – Law 14/2011 – Protects vulnerable groups; not specific to disability but demonstrates enforcement of protective legislation.
- General Legislative Frameworks and Sectoral Provisions – Various codes and laws contain provisions benefiting persons with disabilities, though not exclusively.
- National Strategies and Plans – Strategic instruments guide inclusion policies, including for persons with disabilities.<sup>23</sup>

## 5 Decisions of courts and tribunals

**5.1 Have the courts (or tribunals) in Guinea-Bissau ever decided on an issue relating to disability? If so, list the cases and provide a summary for each of the cases indicating the facts, the decision(s), the reasoning and impact (if any) the cases have had.**

The judiciary in Guinea-Bissau faces significant institutional, cultural, and operational weaknesses, limiting the protection of persons with disabilities. Although the country ratified the CRPD in 2014, its principles of inclusion and non-discrimination have not been consistently applied. The justice system suffers from lack of resources, poor infrastructure, and limited judicial independence, which suppresses access to justice and the ability to respond to rights violations.<sup>24</sup>

A landmark case recorded in 2015 in the Biombo region involved sexual violence against a child with a disability. The accused was prosecuted, tried, and convicted under article 110 of the Penal Code, which protects the life and physical integrity of children, including those with disabilities. This judgment occurred amid international pressure from the UN Human Rights Council to address ritual killings of children with disabilities, demonstrating that criminal accountability, though rare, is possible.<sup>25</sup>

In contrast, other serious cases have not led to judicial action. One example is the ritual killing of a child with a disability in Bissau, where the child drowned as

22 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (n 14).

23 As above.

24 Imbunde (n 11).

25 Office of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea Bissau (n 12).

part of a traditional ritual considered by certain communities as a spiritual act rather than a crime. The absence of prosecution in this case underscores the influence of cultural prejudices and the state's failure to enforce legal protections for persons with disabilities.<sup>26</sup>

Overall, the justice system shows a wide gap between Guinea-Bissau's international obligations and domestic implementation regarding disability rights. The isolated conviction does not indicate a trend of accountability, as impunity remains widespread due to structural, cultural, and institutional barriers. Comprehensive reforms, human rights education, and targeted public policies are necessary to ensure compliance with the CRPD and guarantee justice for persons with disabilities.<sup>27</sup>

## 6 Policies and programmes

### 6.1 Does Guinea-Bissau have policies or programmes that directly address disability? If so, list each policy and explain how the policy addresses disability.

In June 2023, Guinea-Bissau adopted the National Strategy for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities, as a specific national policy that directly addresses issues relating to disability. This strategy is a comprehensive framework aimed at guiding efforts towards the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in society. It sets out various strategic actions, including the crucial objective of creating specific legislation to ensure compliance with principles such as availability, accessibility, acceptability, and quality in accordance with article 25 of the CRPD. It is designed to foster a more inclusive society by addressing systemic barriers.<sup>28</sup>

### 6.2 Does Guinea-Bissau have policies and programmes that indirectly address disability? If so, list each policy and describe how the policy indirectly addresses disability.

The National Strategic Plan for Inclusive Education, adopted in March 2023, also outlines efforts toward inclusive education for persons with disabilities. This plan specifically focuses on integrating children and persons with disabilities into the education system. It outlines strategies and actions to make education accessible and inclusive, ensuring that persons with disabilities have equal opportunities to learn and develop within the mainstream educational environment.<sup>29</sup>

These policies demonstrate Guinea-Bissau's commitment to implementing the principles of the CRPD and fostering a more inclusive society for persons with disabilities.

26 As above.

27 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (n 14).

28 Office of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea Bissau (n 12)

29 As above

## 7 Disability bodies

### 7.1 Other than the ordinary courts and tribunals, does Guinea-Bissau have any official body that specifically addresses violations of the rights of persons with disabilities? If so, describe the body, its functions and its powers.

Guinea-Bissau currently does not have an official body specifically established to monitor or address violations of the rights of persons with disabilities. While strategic initiatives, such as the National Strategy for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (2022) and the proposed Basic Law on the Protection, Promotion and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, aim to guide intersectoral policies, they lack coercive or enforcement powers and remain largely advisory.<sup>30 31</sup>

Some sectoral structures, such as the General Directorate for Inclusive Education (DGEI) and the Inclusive Education Support Centres (CAEI), focus on promoting inclusive education and providing technical support to students with disabilities. However, these bodies do not have judicial or supervisory authority and cannot investigate or sanction rights violations. Their role is primarily in policy implementation, training, and dissemination of resources.<sup>32</sup>

### 7.2 Other than the ordinary courts or tribunals, does Guinea-Bissau have any official body that though not established to specifically address violations of the rights of persons with disabilities, can nonetheless do so? If so, describe the body, its functions and its powers.

Several broader-mandate institutions can indirectly act to protect the rights of persons with disabilities. The National Commission for Human Rights and Citizenship (CNDHC) monitors human rights, reports violations, and recommends actions. While it lacks judicial authority, its mandate includes disability-related issues, and it serves as the main consultative and oversight body for human rights in the country.<sup>33</sup>

Other relevant bodies include the National Child Protection Commission, the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, and the Office of the Attorney General. These institutions can address cases affecting persons with disabilities as part of their general human rights and child protection mandates. Nevertheless, systemic challenges – such as limited resources, political instability, impunity, traditional

30 EA Costa 'Orphaned children in Guinea-Bissau' (2023) <https://repositorio.unilab.edu.br/jspui/handle/123456789/3482> (accessed 28 October 2025).

31 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (n 14).

32 UNICEF 'National Strategic Plan for Inclusive Education for Guinea-Bissau 2022-2028' (2022) <https://www.unicef.org/guineabissau/media/2136/file/Plano%20Estrat%C3%A9gico%20Nacional%20de%20Educa%C3%A7%C3%A3o%20Inclusiva%20para%20a%20Guin%C3%A9-Bissau%202022%20%E2%80%93%202028.pdf> (accessed 28 October 2025).

33 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (n 14).

practices, and low awareness of legislation – severely constrain their capacity to provide effective protection.<sup>34</sup>

## 8 National human rights institutions, Human Rights Commission, Ombudsman or Public Protector

### 8.1 Does Guinea-Bissau have a Human Rights Commission, an Ombudsman or Public Protector? If so, does its remit include the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities? If your answer is yes, also indicate whether the Human Rights Commission, Ombudsman or Public Protector has ever addressed issues relating to the rights of persons with disabilities.

Guinea-Bissau has a CNDHC, revised in 2022 to align with the Paris Principles and formally approved in 2024, serving as the country's main institution for the promotion and protection of human rights and as the de facto human rights unit within the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights.<sup>35</sup> The government has also announced plans to establish an Ombudsman (Public Protector) to function as a national human rights institution in line with international recommendations. The CNDHC's mandate explicitly includes vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities, reinforced by Guinea-Bissau's ratification of the CRPD, the National Strategy for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (2022), the National Strategy for Inclusive Education (2023), and the draft Basic Law on Protection, Promotion, and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities currently under review.<sup>36</sup>

Despite these frameworks, effective implementation of disability-related policies remains limited. The country lacks adequate legal enforcement tools, and systemic challenges – including political instability, widespread impunity, persistence of traditional beliefs associating disability with curses, and weak state presence in rural areas – hinder protection and service access.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, CSOs, such as the Guinean Human Rights League and local associations, play a critical role in raising awareness, monitoring violations, and supporting enforcement of international standards. While the CNDHC has demonstrated commitment to disability rights, its actual impact depends on stronger institutional capacity, resources, and coordination with state and non-state actors.<sup>38</sup>

34 UNDP 'Country programme document for Guinea-Bissau 2022-2026' (2024) [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2024-11/cpd1\\_final\\_0.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2024-11/cpd1_final_0.pdf) (accessed 28 October 2025).

35 United Nations Human Rights Council (n 14).

36 UNDP (n 34).

37 I Dansó 'Guinea-Bissau: Association denounces abuse against people with disabilities' *DW* 20 January 2022 <https://www.dw.com/pt-002/associa%C3%A7%C3%A3o-guineense-denuncia-abusos-contrapessoas-com-defici%C3%Aancia/a-60492302> (accessed 28 October 2025).

38 United Nations Human Rights Council (n 14).

## 9 Disabled peoples organisations (DPOs) and other civil society organisations

### 9.1 Does Guinea-Bissau have organisations that represent and advocate for the rights and welfare of persons with disabilities? If so, list each organisation and describe its activities.

Guinea-Bissau has several organisations representing persons with disabilities, including the Guinean League for Human Rights (LGDH), Guinean Association for the Rehabilitation and Integration of the Blind (AGRICE), Federation of Associations for the Defence and Promotion of Persons with Disabilities of Guinea-Bissau (FADPD-GB), and the National Platform of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities for Inclusive Development (PNOPDDI). These organisations engage in advocacy, public awareness campaigns, policy development, inclusive education initiatives, and the creation of essential services, such as the Bengala Branca School and the Guinean Sign Language Dictionary.<sup>39,40</sup>

Their activities include monitoring violations, promoting rehabilitation and access to training, and collaborating with international partners to compensate for institutional gaps. LGDH also addresses broader human rights issues while highlighting violations affecting persons with disabilities. AGRICE focuses on visual disabilities and educational inclusion. FADPD-GB works with public and international institutions to promote inclusive education, and PNOPDDI coordinates local associations nationwide.<sup>41</sup>

### 9.2 In the countries in Guinea-Bissau's region (Oriental Africa), are DPOs organised or coordinated at national and/or regional level?

In Guinea-Bissau, there is no formal national or regional coordination of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs). However, they participate in broader networks, such as the Human Rights and Child Rights NGO Forum of the PALOP countries (Portuguese-speaking African Countries), which facilitates some regional collaboration.

In other West African countries, there are examples of regional articulation among OPDs, especially in Lusophone Africa (for example, Angola and Cape Verde). These networks provide normative support through instruments like the ACHPR and the 2018 Protocol on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa, though formal regional coordination remains limited.<sup>42</sup>

39 ZBS Sarr 'Social and educational policies for children with disabilities in schools in Guinea-Bissau' UNILAB Institutional Repository (2021) <https://repositorio.unilab.edu.br/jspui/handle/123456789/4661> (accessed 28 October 2025).

40 RT Djaló 'Educational Public Policies in Guinea-Bissau: The case of visually impaired persons (2009-2016)' UNILAB Institutional Repository (2022) <https://repositorio.unilab.edu.br/jspui/handle/123456789/4266> (accessed 28 October 2025).

41 United Nations Development Programme (n 3).

42 Cá (n 15).

### **9.3 If Guinea-Bissau has ratified the CRPD, how has it ensured the involvement of DPOs in the implementation process?**

Guinea-Bissau ratified the CRPD in 2014 and has since engaged DPOs through the development of the National Strategy for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (2022) and the National Strategy for Inclusive Education (2023). DPOs were involved in consultations and advocacy that informed these strategies, ensuring their perspectives were incorporated into national policy frameworks.

DPOs also contributed to reporting processes, such as national reports for the UPR, and provided input for the draft Basic Law on Protection, Promotion, and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, further integrating their voices into the implementation of CRPD obligations.<sup>43</sup>

### **9.4 What types of actions have DPOs themselves taken to ensure that they are fully embedded in the process of implementation?**

DPOs have actively conducted advocacy campaigns, public awareness initiatives, and policy lobbying, while creating concrete services to address gaps, such as the Bengala Branca School and the Guinean Sign Language Dictionary.<sup>44</sup> They also collaborate with international partners like the EU and Handicap International, participate in national strategy consultations, and monitor government compliance with disability rights obligations. These actions ensure their perspectives are considered in policymaking and service delivery.<sup>45 46</sup>

### **9.5 What, if any, are the barriers DPOs have faced in engaging with implementation?**

DPOs face significant barriers including political instability, weak infrastructure, limited state support, outdated statistical data, and deep-rooted social prejudice, such as beliefs that disability is a curse.<sup>47 48</sup> Other obstacles include lack of financial resources, insufficient technical capacity, and limited effectiveness of public policies, which collectively hinder meaningful participation in policymaking, monitoring, and enforcement of disability.<sup>49</sup>

### **9.6 Are there specific instances that provide ‘best-practice models’ for ensuring proper involvement of DPOs?**

The participatory process for the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework in Guinea-Bissau is an example of inclusive consultation, where DPOs and civil society actors were engaged in shaping development priorities.<sup>50 51</sup> Additionally, the creation of specialised services like the Bengala Branca School

43 United Nations Development Programme (n 3).

44 Office of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea Bissau (n 12).

45 United Nations Development Programme (n 3).

46 Djaló (n 40).

47 BJT Silva ‘Human rights in Guinea-Bissau: An analysis of the role and challenges of the Guinean League for Human Rights of Guinea-Bissau’ UNILAB Institutional Repository: (2016) <https://repositorio.unilab.edu.br/jspui/handle/123456789/2818> (accessed 28 October 2025).

48 Djaló (n 40).

49 Biague (n 17).

50 United Nations Development Programme (n 3).

51 UNDP (n 34).

and the Guinean Sign Language Dictionary demonstrates effective collaboration between DPOs, government, and international partners, serving as models for participatory planning and policy implementation.<sup>52</sup>

**9.7 Are there any specific outcomes regarding successful implementation and/or improved recognition of the rights of persons with disabilities that resulted from the engagement of DPOs in the implementation process?**

DPO engagement has contributed to the ratification of the CRPD, the adoption of national strategies, and increased public debate on disability rights. Access to inclusive education has improved through initiatives like the Bengala Branca School, and awareness of sign language and disability inclusion has expanded via the Guinean Sign Language Dictionary.<sup>53 54</sup> These outcomes indicate that DPO involvement strengthens policy development, promotes social inclusion, and fills gaps left by limited state capacity, although challenges remain in ensuring full implementation and enforcement.<sup>55</sup>

**9.8 Has your research shown areas for capacity building and support (particularly in relation to research) for DPOs with respect to their engagement with the implementation process?**

DPOs require capacity building in technical skills, research, and data collection to participate effectively in policy monitoring and the implementation of CRPD obligations.<sup>56 57</sup> Enhancing research capacity would allow DPOs to document violations, analyse policy effectiveness, and provide evidence-based recommendations, thereby increasing their influence in national decision-making and advocacy processes.<sup>58</sup>

**9.9 Are there recommendations that come out of your research as to how DPOs might be more comprehensively empowered to take a leading role in the implementation processes of international or regional instruments?**

Recommendations include formalising mechanisms for DPO participation in policymaking, ensuring financial and technical support, improving research capacity, conducting public awareness campaigns, and enforcing accountability measures to address abuse, discrimination, and violence against persons with disabilities. Institutionalised engagement, regular consultations, and stronger collaboration with both state and non-state actors would empower DPOs to take a leading role in CRPD implementation and broader human rights initiatives.<sup>59</sup>

52 United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (n 12).

53 As above.

54 Cá (n 15).

55 United Nations Development Programme (n 3).

56 Biague (n 17).

57 Dansó (n 37).

58 United Nations Development Programme (n 3).

59 As above.

**9.10 Are there specific research institutes in the region that work on the rights of persons with disabilities and that have facilitated the involvement of DPOs in the process, including in research?**

No dedicated research institutes focusing exclusively on disability rights were identified in Guinea-Bissau or its immediate region. However, institutions such as Guinea-Bissau's National Institute of Statistics (INE), along with UN agencies like UNDP and UNICEF, have generated data and partnered with DPOs to inform inclusive policies and improve understanding of the realities faced by persons with disabilities.<sup>60</sup> These collaborations enable DPOs to participate more effectively in policy design and advocacy, compensating for the absence of specialised regional research centres.

## **10 Government departments**

**10.1 Does Guinea-Bissau have a government department(s) that is/are specifically responsible for promoting and protecting the rights and welfare of persons with disabilities? If so, describe the activities of the department(s).**

Guinea-Bissau has established several government departments and entities tasked with promoting and protecting the rights and welfare of persons with disabilities, though significant gaps remain in the effective implementation of policies. The Ministry for Women, Family and Social Solidarity (MFMSS) leads in formulating disability-related policies, such as the National Strategy for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (2022), and coordinates initiatives that address vulnerabilities, particularly for women and children with disabilities. The Ministry of National Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research oversees inclusive education through the National Strategy for Inclusive Education (2023) and the Directorate-General for Inclusive Education (DGEI), responsible for mapping students with special education needs and providing adapted teaching resources, including the Guinean Sign Language Dictionary and braille materials. The Ministry of Justice and Human Rights contributes by reporting on CRPD implementation, developing a National Strategy for Human Rights and Citizenship, and promoting accountability for human rights violations. Additionally, the National Human Rights Commission, following the revision of its statutes in 2022 to align with the Paris Principles, monitors the human rights situation, including the rights of persons with disabilities, and submits reports to the Human Rights Council (HRC). Despite these structures, challenges such as political instability, social prejudice, inaccessible infrastructure, lack of trained professionals, and insufficient funding limit the translation of legal and policy frameworks into tangible improvements in the lives of persons with disabilities.

60 UNDP (n 34).

## 11 Main human rights concerns of people with disabilities in Guinea-Bissau

### 11.1 What are the contemporary challenges of persons with disabilities in Guinea-Bissau?

Persons with disabilities in Guinea-Bissau face a range of significant contemporary challenges, stemming from societal attitudes, limited access to basic services, and, in some severe cases, harmful traditional practices and violence. These may include deep-seated prejudice and negative social norms surrounding disability, limited access to basic services, poverty and social marginalisation, and harmful customary practices and violence.<sup>61</sup>

### 11.2 Describe these contemporary challenges of persons with disabilities, and the legal responses thereto, and assess the adequacy of these responses.

In Guinea-Bissau, children with disabilities are often stigmatised due to beliefs that link disability to curses or witchcraft, leading to neglect, abandonment, and social ostracisation. Essential services such as health, education, and social assistance remain largely inaccessible, with school non-attendance among youth with disabilities estimated at 59 per cent. Schools frequently lack inclusive education training, accessible infrastructure, and equitable practices. Disability is closely associated with poverty, malnutrition, and social marginalisation, which limits access to work, education, and social services, further exacerbating inequalities.<sup>62</sup>

Harmful traditional practices pose additional risks. Some ethnic groups in remote areas perceive children with disabilities as reincarnations of bad spirits, exposing them to psychological, physical, and sexual violence, and in extreme cases, infanticide. Reports highlight ritual homicides and elevated violence against women with disabilities compared to women without disabilities. Calls have been made to prevent these abuses, investigate incidents, and prosecute perpetrators, yet implementation remains weak.<sup>63 64</sup>

Despite progress through the domestication of the CRPD and adoption of national strategies, Guinea-Bissau lacks a comprehensive national law exclusively dedicated to disability rights, leaving enforcement dependent on broad interpretations of general laws. Persistent challenges – including limited access to services, inadequate infrastructure, high poverty rates, and deep-seated social prejudices – highlight gaps in effective implementation and societal protection. Legislative reforms are underway to align domestic law with international instruments, but full impact on disability rights remains limited and gradual.<sup>65</sup>

61 C Alves, R Mbouet & M Gonzalez 'In Guinea Bissau, students with disabilities hit the books to make their parents proud' World Food Programme (1 December 2023) <https://www.wfp.org/stories/guinea-bissau-students-disabilities-hit-books-make-their-parents-proud> (accessed 28 October 2025).

62 Suvillaga (n 6).

63 United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau 'Fulfilling the human rights of children with disability must be a priority' *UNIOGBIS* 29 May 2015.

64 UNICEF (n 32).

65 UNDP (n 36).

### **11.3 Do persons with disabilities have a right to participation in political life (political representation and leadership) in Guinea-Bissau?**

In Guinea-Bissau, persons with disabilities have a legal right to participate in political life through the nation's ratification of the CRPD, which guarantees voting, candidacy, accessible procedures, and involvement in political and civil organisations. While the Constitution broadly ensures equality and rights for all citizens, national legislation does not yet fully implement these CRPD provisions, and practical barriers persist, including inaccessible infrastructure, lack of support and accessible information, societal prejudice, and low representation, particularly for women with disabilities. Administrative hurdles such as legal guardianship, missing identification documents, and limited awareness among electoral officials further restrict participation. Consequently, despite formal legal recognition, meaningful political engagement for persons with disabilities remains limited, highlighting the need for advocacy, capacity-building, and systemic reforms to bridge the gap between legal rights and actual inclusion.<sup>66</sup>

### **11.4 Are persons with disabilities' socio-economic rights, including the right to health, education and other social services protected and realised in Guinea-Bissau?**

With regard to education and other social services, see question 11.2 above.

In Guinea-Bissau, the socio-economic rights of persons with disabilities, including the rights to health, education, and other social services, are recognised through international commitments, particularly the ratification of the CRPD. However, the full realisation of these rights faces significant challenges due to systemic issues, limited resources, and societal barriers.

While the CRPD provides the overarching legal framework, the translation of these international obligations into specific national laws and policies for persons with disabilities is an ongoing process. Reports indicate that a comprehensive legal instrument or policy on persons with disabilities defining the obligations of state institutions is still needed. The Constitution of Guinea-Bissau makes a general reference to the disabled, but more specific legislation is advocated for by disability organisations. Despite legal commitments, the realisation of these rights in practice is often limited by various factors: underfunded and resource-limited healthcare system, concentration in urban areas, lack of specialised services and political instability.

The healthcare system in Guinea-Bissau is significantly underfunded and lacks essential resources, including qualified medical staff and adequate infrastructure. In addition, health services are largely concentrated in the capital, Bissau, leaving many people in rural areas without access to medical care. There is also a deficiency in specialised medical services for persons with disabilities, including functional rehabilitation and doctors who understand sign language for deaf patients. Finally, ongoing political instability has consistently undermined efforts to improve healthcare, leading to frequent changes in administration within the Ministry of Health.<sup>67</sup> Despite all these challenges, organisations have been working with the Ministry of Health in order to control neglected tropical diseases

66 World Bank Group 'Disability inclusion' <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/disability> (accessed 28 October 2025).

67 World Health Organisation (n 1).

and improve public health services. There are also efforts to strengthen the national health system and introduce accountability mechanisms.<sup>68</sup>

### 11.5 Specific categories experiencing particular issues/vulnerabilities.

- **Persons with disabilities (PWDs):** Face high poverty and social marginalisation; encounter prejudice, discrimination, and social stigma; have limited access to healthcare, education, social services, and accessible infrastructure; and are exposed to harmful customary practices, violence, and ritualistic killings, especially in rural areas.<sup>69</sup>
- **Children with disabilities:** Often excluded from education due to lack of inclusive infrastructure and trained teachers; are at risk of violence and abuse linked to harmful customs and superstitions.<sup>70</sup>
- **Women with disabilities:** Experience compounded discrimination based on gender and disability; face higher rates of violence compared to women without disabilities.<sup>71</sup>
- **Children in general:** Suffer from high malnutrition and limited healthcare access, particularly in rural areas; encounter barriers to school enrolment, attendance, and completion; are vulnerable to child labour, violence, abuse, and exploitation.<sup>72</sup>
- **Populations in rural areas:** Have limited access to health services, education, and infrastructure, which worsens vulnerabilities for all residents, especially persons with disabilities.
- **Individuals living in poverty:** Face severe limitations in access to opportunities, reinforcing cycles of disadvantage, particularly for persons with disabilities and their families.<sup>73</sup>

## 12 Future perspective

### 12.1 Are there any specific measures with regard to persons with disabilities being debated or considered in Guinea-Bissau at the moment?

Guinea-Bissau is currently discussing several measures to improve the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Key initiatives include the National Strategy for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (adopted in 2022) and the National Strategy for Inclusive Education (adopted in 2023), both of which aim to address barriers in education, health, and social services. Other measures include the National Policy for the Comprehensive Protection of Children, the establishment of the Directorate-General for Inclusive Education, and social awareness campaigns led by the Ministry of Public Health in collaboration with international partners. While these measures provide a framework for inclusion, their effective implementation remains limited by insufficient resources, inadequate infrastructure, and societal stigma.

68 Sightsavers 'Sightsavers in Guinea-Bissau'.

69 World Health Organisation (n 1).

70 G Benchwick 'Education a lifeline for children with disabilities in Central African Republic' *UNICEF USA* 6 May 2025 <https://www.unicefusa.org/stories/education-lifeline-children-disabilities-central-african-republic> (accessed 28 October 2025).

71 UPR 'Guinea-Bissau' <https://upr-info.org/en/review/guinea-bissau> (accessed 28 October 2025).

72 Benchwick (n 70).

73 UNICEF 'Social inclusion: Building and inclusive society' (2022) <https://www.unicef.org/guineabissau/social-inclusion> (accessed 28 October 2025).

## **12.2 What legal reforms are being proposed? Which legal reforms would you like to see in Guinea-Bissau? Why?**

Several legal reforms are under consideration to strengthen protections for persons with disabilities. The Draft Basic Law for the Protection, Promotion, and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities is intended to create a comprehensive legal framework aligning national law with international standards. Other proposals include the Draft Code for the Comprehensive Protection of Children and revisions to core legal codes, including labour law provisions for persons with reduced capacity. Additional desirable reforms include strong anti-discrimination legislation; laws ensuring universal accessibility in public and private spaces; mandates for inclusive teacher training and curriculum reform; improved judicial capacity and specialised training for police, prosecutors, and judges; and the creation of reliable, up-to-date disability data systems. These reforms are critical to address gaps in enforcement, social stigma, and protection against violence, including ritual killings, and to translate existing commitments into practical outcomes.