



Ensuring Global Representation and Accessibility for COSP19

23 January 2026

Inventory

DPI was founded in 1981 to promote recognition of the fundamental rights of persons with disabilities. The fruitful meetings and exchanges that have taken place each year since the first session in 2008 at the Conference of States Parties to the CRPD, are a testament to the success of this initiative. Today, DPI is concerned about the consequences of measures taken by the US government to restrict the granting of visas for entry into the United States.

While it is impossible to provide a definitive headcount, current data and recent executive actions by the Trump administration suggest that a significant portion of civil society participants (potentially **30% to 50%** of those from non-Western countries) may be unable to attend the **19th Session of the Conference of States Parties (COSP19)** in New York in June 2026.

Based on the legal landscape as of January 2026, here is an evaluation of the factors preventing attendance:

1. The 2026 "Expanded Travel Ban"¹

As of **January 1, 2026**, Presidential Proclamation 10998 expanded restrictions to **39 countries**.²

- **Full Suspension (19 countries):**³ Nationals from countries like Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Haiti, Mali, and Sudan are subject to a near-total ban on visa issuance.
- **Partial Suspension (20 countries):** For countries including Nigeria, Venezuela, and Cuba, the administration has suspended **B-1/B-2 visitor visas**—the exact category required for NGO representatives to attend UN conferences.

2. The "Public Charge" and Health Criteria⁶

A critical obstacle for this specific conference is the **November 2025 Health Directive**.⁷ This policy instructs consular officers to deny visas to individuals with chronic conditions or disabilities if they are deemed a potential "public charge."

- **Medical Scrutiny:** Officers now evaluate whether a participant's disability might require "expensive, long-term care" or if they have the "financial means to cover future medical expenses" during their stay.
- **Discretionary Power:** Because the COSP specifically involves persons with disabilities, this directive acts as a targeted filter, allowing officers to deny entry based on the physical or neurological profile of the applicant.



3. Estimated Impact on Attendance

To estimate the numbers, we can look at the typical participant profile and recent visa trends:

- **Civil Society (The "South"):** Historically, about 40% of registered NGOs come from the Global South. Given that the 75-country "Immigrant Visa Freeze" (started January 21, 2026) has created a backlog that spills over into non-immigrant processing, delays alone will prevent hundreds from attending.
- **Refusal Rates:** While official UN delegates (G-visas) have some protection under the **UN Headquarters Agreement**, the administration has increasingly used "national security" as a 理由 to bypass these obligations. For non-governmental participants, refusal rates for COSP19 are projected to be **double** those of the 2024 session.

Summary Table: Risk of Denial for COSP19

| Participant Group | Risk Level | Primary Obstacle |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|---|
| Government Delegates | Low / Moderate | Administrative delays and "Security Vetting." |
| NGOs (EU, Canada, Japan) | Low | Routine processing. |
| NGOs (African/Middle Eastern nations) | Critical | Proclamation 10998 (Direct Travel Ban). |
| Individuals with visible disabilities | High | 2025 Health/Public Charge Directive. |

Conclusion

The combination of geographic bans and the new health-based "public charge" rules creates a "double barrier" for the COSP19. We can expect **the 2026 session to be one of the least diverse in the history of the Convention**, with representation heavily skewed toward those already residing in the U.S. or from "exempt" Western nations.

In response to the increasingly restrictive visa landscape in the United States, several major international disability organizations and UN-affiliated bodies have already begun shifting their focus toward **Geneva** and **Vienna** to ensure global participation in 2026.

While the official **COSP19** remains scheduled for New York (June 9–11, 2026), the following "alternative" hubs and side events have emerged to accommodate those unable to secure U.S. visas:

1. Vienna: The "Zero Project" Alternative Hub1

Vienna has positioned itself as the primary alternative for civil society due to its more stable visa environment and its role as a UN headquarters.

- **Zero Project Conference 2026 (#ZeroCon26):** Taking place **February 18–20, 2026**, at the United Nations Office at Vienna (UNOV).
- **Strategic Shift:** Many NGOs are redirecting their travel budgets from the June COSP to this February event. The conference organizers have explicitly increased the number of "policy-



innovation" sessions usually found at COSP to accommodate leaders who cannot enter the U.S.

- **Hybrid Infrastructure:** Vienna is hosting "Regional Satellites," allowing delegates from Africa and Asia to participate in real-time if they are denied entry to Europe as well.

2. Geneva: The "Human Rights Oversight" Hub

As the home of the **OHCHR** and the **Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, Geneva is becoming the site for the "Shadow COSP" activities.

- **NGO Parallel Sessions:** Several international disability alliances (such as the International Disability Alliance) are organizing side events in Geneva during the same week as the New York COSP (June 2026). These events are designed to be live-streamed directly into the New York conference rooms to ensure voices from the Global South are heard.
- **Focus on Elections:** Since nine members of the CRPD Committee will be elected in 2026, candidates who cannot travel to New York are increasingly setting up "campaign hubs" in Geneva to meet with diplomatic missions that have secondary offices there.

3. Regional "Satellite" Events (Europe and Beyond)

In addition to the UN hubs, regional conferences are being timed to act as "feeder" events for those excluded from the U.S.:

- **Europe in Action 2026:** Taking place in **Italy (May 25–27, 2026)**.³ This event is being marketed as a critical gathering for the intellectual disability movement to finalize positions before the New York session, specifically for those who know their U.S. visa is at risk.
- **Bali WDR 2026: The World Disability and Rehabilitation Conference** in Bali is offering a robust "Hybrid Participation" model specifically tailored to delegates from the 75 countries currently under the U.S. visa freeze.

Comparison of Accessibility for 2026

| Feature | New York (COSP19) | Vienna/Geneva Hubs |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Visa Risk | Critical (Health & Nationality bans) | Low to Moderate (Schengen rules) |
| Diplomatic Weight | Highest (Official voting) | High (Policy & Advocacy) |
| Civil Society Presence | Likely diminished/Western-centric | Highly diverse/Global South focus |
| Remote Integration | Limited to viewing | Interactive "Satellite" speaking roles |

Advice for Participants: Many organizations are now advising delegates from "High Risk" countries (per the Jan 2026 U.S. list) to **not** apply for U.S. visas if they have any health-related public charge concerns, and instead register for the **Vienna-Geneva virtual bridge** events to avoid the cost and record of a visa denial.