

Making the right real for persons with disabilities

WHO

In Asia and the Pacific, 1 in every 6 persons lives with some form of disability: 650 million women, men and children.

WHAT

Disability is a condition which may restrict a person's ability to undertake a task, depending on how personal functioning and the environment interact. Government interventions are required on two fronts: (a) Provision of health-care and rehabilitation services to address personal functioning; (b) Creation of all-inclusive and enabling societies that facilitate participation of persons with disabilities in schools, work, leisure and political life.

WHY

Disability is not merely an issue of social protection, but one of human rights. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006) is a global commitment to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of all persons with disabilities. At the Asia-Pacific level, the Incheon Strategy to "Make the Right Real" for Persons with Disabilities is the regional document to put in practice the principles and values of the CRPD during the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013–2022.

ISSUE: Data

FACT: Disability in Asia and the Pacific is grossly underestimated

Prevalence of disability in the region provides a contrasting picture, ranging from 1.0% in the Lao People's Democratic Republic to 18.5% in Australia. The average disability prevalence for the region, based on government-reported data, is 4.6%. This figure stands in stark contrast to the WHO-World Bank global prevalence estimate, 15%, and means that only 200 million out of 650 million persons with disabilities are counted in official statistics. The discrepancy points to diverse definitions and conceptual approaches to disability, and disparate instruments and tools used for measuring it. The poor standard of disability data hampers adequate assessments of the quality of life and the extent of socioeconomic participation of persons with disabilities, the first step in designing effective policies and programmes.

ISSUE: Legal framework

FACT: Asia-Pacific records the lowest level of CRPD ratification

The Asia-Pacific region has the lowest rates of signature to and ratification of the CRPD since it was opened for signing in 2007. By the end of 2013, there were 139 States Parties and 159 Signatories worldwide; of these, only 37 Signatories and 32 States Parties were from the Asia-Pacific region.

Ratification is a significant step towards the realization of the rights of persons with disabilities, but is not an end in itself. Ratification should be followed or preceded by the harmonization of domestic legislation and policies with the Convention, including the establishment of enforceable anti-discrimination laws on disability, and the amendment and possible nullification of laws which currently, directly or indirectly, discriminate against persons with disabilities.

ISSUE: Accessibility**FACT: Enhancing accessibility will significantly contribute to better living conditions for persons with disabilities**

In many parts of the region, barriers to the physical environment, public transport, knowledge, and information and communication services still prevent persons with diverse disabilities from leading productive and meaningful lives. Consequently, many persons with disabilities face difficulties in attending school, acquiring a range of skills and experiences, finding and keeping jobs, and engaging in diverse aspects of community and social life. Since the population of the Asia-Pacific region is growing older, it is expected that an increasing number of persons with disabilities will require accessible environments and services to remain mobile and engaged in society. That demand for accessible environments and services must be anticipated now.

ISSUE: Private sector**FACT: Expanding employment opportunities for persons with disabilities will reduce labour and skill shortages and improve living standards**

Catering to the needs of persons with disabilities contributes to the creation of jobs, as well as a more inclusive, productive and just society in Asia and the Pacific. New economic opportunities can be generated through the expansion of markets that are responsive to the specific needs of persons with disabilities. Disability-inclusive business is a pioneering concept that views persons with disabilities as an untapped workforce with a range of skills and a potential market with significant purchasing power.

ISSUE: Disaster risk reduction**FACT: The death toll caused by natural disasters is much higher among persons with disabilities than those without disabilities**

Persons with disabilities are among the primary victims of any natural disaster. As a result of inaccessible evacuation systems, insufficient support, and the lack of preparedness by rescue professionals and people in local communities, the 2011 Tohoku earthquake in Japan highlighted the stark differences in the rates of death or persons missing between persons with and without disabilities. In Minamusanriku, a town in Miyagi Prefecture, 12% of persons with disabilities died or went missing, in comparison to 4% of persons without disabilities.

ESCAP's Work

ESCAP is promoting the full realization of the rights of persons with disabilities and disability-inclusive development through supporting efforts to implement the Incheon Strategy in the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013–2022. The thrust of the Strategy focuses on evidence-based policies and programmes, including disability data collection, to enable Governments to measure progress in meeting the 10 goals, 27 targets and 62 indicators during the Decade.

Currently working within the first five-year road map for the implementation of the Incheon Strategy, ESCAP is promoting CRPD ratification through the Make the Right Real Campaign and supporting Government and civil society stakeholders in their endeavours to strengthen the evidence base; enhance accessibility to the physical environment, public transport, knowledge, information and communication; promote disability inclusion in business operations; and ensure disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction and management.

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