



C20 India

Disability, Equity, Justice Policy Brief¹

¹ For detailed context and recommendations, informed through extensive civil society consultations, see India C20: Disability, Equity, Justice White Paper 2023: <https://risingflame.org/project/india-c20-disability-equity-justice-white-paper-2023/>

Introduction

PwDs are among the largest minority groups in the world: 1.3 billion people—16% of the population—live with a disability, and approximately two thirds of PwDs live in G20 countries. Research shows that PwDs in low- and middle-income countries are often ‘poorer than their nondisabled peers.’ Even in developed countries, PwDs are more likely to live in poverty.

Rights of PwDs have been advanced through the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Moreover, in 2016, the G20 committed to align its work with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which commit to disability inclusion and leaving no one behind.

Inclusion of PwDs, however, has yet to receive strategic planning, implementation, and resources even though lack of inclusion can cost countries up to 7% of their GDP. PwDs, particularly WwDs, are systematically excluded in education, employment, health systems and disaster response. They face barriers in accessing physical and digital spaces, and high levels of all forms of discrimination, abuse, and violence— often resulting in significant, long-standing physical and mental health consequences.

It is in the human, social and economic interest of the global community that PwDs find budgetary allocation and commitment in implementing plans for inclusive, sustainable and resilient growth; and are seen as active citizens, taxpayers, consumers, and nation builders. Meaningful participation of PwDs in governance at all levels is critical to effective planning and implementation, and confronting stigma and discrimination that undergirds exclusion.

Education

Context

The G20 Riyadh,² Rome,³ and Bali⁴ Leaders’ Declarations commit to inclusive education, noting the importance of technology. The right to education for CwDs, free from discrimination, is recognized by the UNCRPD, UNESCO,⁵ the SDGs,⁶ and UNCRC.⁷

² G20 Riyadh Leaders’ Declaration, 2020, para. 26.

³ G20 Rome Leaders’ Declaration, 2021, para. 36.

⁴ G20 Bali Leaders’ Declaration, 2022, para. 44.

⁵ The UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, 1962, including 109 States Parties at the time of writing, protects the right to education and prohibits any form of discrimination, including any distinction, exclusion, limitation, or preference.

⁶ SDG 4 and Agenda 2030 provide a strong vision that has guided initiatives to foster inclusion of children with disabilities (CwDs) in schools.

⁷ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 23).

CwDs are 25% less likely to receive early childhood education, 33% more likely to be out of lower-secondary, and 27% more likely to be out of upper-secondary school. CwDs who attend school experience exclusion due to inaccessibility, unidentified needs, segregation, corporal punishment, and bullying.⁸ The result: lower academic achievement, 37% poorer mental health outcomes,⁹ grade repetition, dropout, and limited future education and employment. They also have harder transitions to higher and tertiary education due to stigma that discourages disclosing disabilities; inaccessible buildings, learning resources, and digital access; and inadequate inclusion.¹⁰

Recommendations

- Make time-bound, concerted efforts to transform all schools and universities into cross-disability inclusive educational institutions with requisite disability policies, commitments, and human and financial resources.
- Ensure full and effective participation, inclusion, and quality education for all CwDs and adults with disabilities in urban and rural areas, across socioeconomic strata, residential facilities, and in situations of conflict and disaster.
- Conduct screening for early identification and support CwDs and families through early childhood education.
- Ensure equitable, inclusive and accessible education through adequate funding in educational, research and training institutions across all levels in terms of design, infrastructure, and information communication technologies. This should include universal design for learning, access to reading-teaching materials online and offline, assistive devices, classrooms, toilets, exams, laboratories, libraries, exhibitions, exposure visits, physical education, and sports, etc. for all CwDs and adults with disabilities.
- Support institutions to develop Personalised Education Plans (PEPs) for students with varied support needs and link financial resources with PEPs.

⁸ UNICEF, *Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities*, January 2022, available online, <https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-with-disabilities-report-2021/>.

⁹ World Health Organization, *Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities 2023*, p. 81, available online <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240063600>.

¹⁰ See Shalini Saksena and Rashmi Sharma, "Deconstructing Barriers to Access Higher Education: A Case Study of Students with Disabilities in University of Delhi," *DU Journal of Undergraduate Research and Innovation*, Volume 1, Issue 2, page 316-337; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Tertiary Education and Employment*, 2011; Weiqin Chen, "Students with Disabilities and Digital Accessibility in Higher Education under COVID-19," in Rodrigo M.M.T et al. (Eds.) (2021), *Proceedings of the 29th International Conference on Computers in Education*. Asia-Pacific Society for Computers in Education.

- Ensure accessible transport and last mile connectivity for persons across disabilities to access learning institutions.
- Ensure training, retraining and development of teaching and non-teaching staff and support personnel to foster inclusive learning environments.
- Ensure PwDs, especially WwDs and girls with disabilities, have equitable access and training for STEM, digital skills, internet and other technological devices.
- Mandate all formal and informal educational institutions to institute reasonable accommodations and adopt zero-tolerance for disability discrimination. Use incentive and penalty systems to ensure enforcement.
- Promote synergies between higher education institutions and job market stakeholders to ensure equal work opportunities.
- Develop education financing that allows students with disabilities to cover extra disability costs. Provide free and subsidised education, scholarship and meal programmes for disadvantaged students.
- Collect disaggregated data by gender, disability, caste and other markers of students with disabilities across levels, institutions and vocational trainings centres.
- Include students with disabilities in all existing and future mainstream government awareness efforts, campaigns, policies, schemes, budgetary allocations.

Employment

Context

The G20 Buenos Aires,¹¹ Osaka,¹² and Bali¹³ Leaders Declarations acknowledge the labour market vulnerability of PwDs and commit to inclusive Futures of Work—including increased labour force participation through vocational training, skill development, reskilling, labour formalisation, and social protection for PwDs.

PwDs—an estimated 785 million working age persons—are marginalised in all labour markets worldwide. They are far more likely to be unemployed, underemployed or economically inactive.¹⁴ Lack of attention to disability inclusion in business development policies forecloses

¹¹ G20 2018 Buenos Aires Leaders' Declaration.

¹² G20 2019 Osaka Leaders' Declaration, para. 21.

¹³ G20 2022 Bali Leaders' Declaration, para. 39.

¹⁴ International Labour Organization (ILO), Policy brief: Making TVET and skills systems inclusive of persons with disabilities 2017, available online https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_605087.pdf.

avenues to self-employment for PwDs. Labour market exclusion of PwDs has significant macroeconomic implications.¹⁵

At work, PwDs are more likely to face workplace discrimination, low wages, poor working conditions, few prospects for promotion, and heightened harassment and violence—especially persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities and WwDs.¹⁶

Recommendations

- Update labour force participation surveys to facilitate disaggregated data by gender, social identity, and disability type.
- Increase labour force participation for PwDs through vocational training, skill development, reskilling, training for platform economy jobs, labour formalisation, and social protection. Ensure that mainstream technical, vocational, education, training, labour market skills and apprenticeship programmes include PwDs.
- Ensure and enforce legal protections against all forms of workplace discrimination, harassment and violence against PwDs, particularly WwDs.¹⁷
- Mandate and enforce the responsibility for public and private employers to ensure accessible physical and digital infrastructure and provide reasonable accommodations to all PwDs. Incentivise inclusion policies, including hiring targets and career development.
- Ensure employers report and publish disability employment data, disaggregated by career-level, disability-type and gender.
- Combat stigma around disability by highlighting contributions and capacities of PwDs across sectors; and encouraging representation of PwDs in decision-making positions on boards and in senior management.
- Prioritise and commit to a set percentage of procurement from entrepreneurs with disabilities under government procurement policies.

¹⁵ International Labour Organization (ILO), “The price of exclusion: The economic consequences of excluding people with disabilities from the world of work,” available online https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_146260.pdf.

¹⁶ See International Labour Organization (ILO), Disability Discrimination at Work, available online https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@declaration/documents/publication/wcms_decl_fs_87_en.pdf; International Labour Organization (ILO), Violence and harassment against persons with disabilities in the world of work, available online https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---gender/documents/briefingnote/wcms_738118.pdf; International Labour Organization (ILO), Policy brief: Making TVET and skills systems inclusive of persons with disabilities, available online https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_605087.pdf.

¹⁷ This recommendation is in line with ILO Violence and Harassment Convention (No. 190) and Recommendation (No. 206).

- Provide technical and financial assistance to small and medium enterprises to promote disability inclusion, and support PwDs within the informal economy and through self-help groups.
- Adapt existing business development policies and programmes to include entrepreneurs with disabilities and improve their access to specialised trainings, credit, technical and financial resources.

Health

Context

The G20 Rome¹⁸ and Bali¹⁹ Leaders' Declarations commit to Universal Health Coverage (UHC). Health equity for PwDs is essential to global health priorities— including UHC and public health interventions that contribute to healthier populations.²⁰ The rights of PwDs to the same range, quality and standard of free or affordable health care is protected under the UNCRPD.²¹ Accessible health infrastructure and systems must ensure PwDs are included, even during pandemics and in disaster health responses.

Research shows that PwDs receive lower levels of health care than persons without disabilities. PwDs experience health inequities arising from structural factors that generate social stratification; risk factors for disease; and barriers within health systems—including limited access to health services, social care, and rehabilitation; inadequate treatment; involuntary treatment and confinement;²² heightened discrimination, and barriers to sexual and

¹⁸ G20 Rome Leaders' Declaration 2021, para. 7.

¹⁹ G20 Bali Leaders' Declaration 2022, para. 19.

²⁰ World Health Organization, Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities 2023, p. 37, available online <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240063600>.

²¹ UNCRPD Article 25 protects the rights of PWDS to the same range, quality, and standard of free or affordable health care.

²² The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) has also expressed concern about involuntary treatment and confinement and has recommended States to take legal steps to abolish surgery and treatment without the full and informed consent of the patient (Art. 23, 25). The Human Rights Committee has affirmed that special protection is necessary in the case of persons not capable of giving valid consent, and that such persons should not be subjected to any medical or scientific experimentation that may be detrimental to their health. See General comment No. 20 (1992) on prohibition of torture and cruel treatment or punishment, para. 7.

reproductive healthcare.²³ The result: poorer health outcomes, reduced life expectancy and higher mortality rates.²⁴

Recommendations

- Take urgent action to address the vast inequities in health care access for all PwDs, including those with mental health conditions, chronic illnesses and rare diseases. Take integrated action to strengthen health systems through disaggregated data collection, policymaking, financing and budgetary allocations.
- Ensure accessibility of health infrastructure at all levels (particularly within rural areas), including: physical and digital infrastructure, access to information, and community-based rehabilitation. Train all health professionals on disability needs, and invest in installing adequate support personnel.
- Ensure persons across disabilities are engaged at all stages of design, implementation, and monitoring of healthcare facilities and public health interventions for effective inclusion.
- Ensure all public health initiatives, programmes and curricula are disability inclusive and gender sensitive.
- Ensure availability of tax-free, duty-free, affordable assistive devices and technologies that cater to specific needs of WwDs and PwDs.
- Improve access to sexual and reproductive health rights including access to abortion.
- Include PwDs in the health and care workforce.
- Ensure early identification, rehabilitation and ongoing support to CwDs with rare diseases.
- Mandate provision of full medical insurance with no discrimination by public and private players to all PwDs, including the elderly, and people living with mental health conditions, rare diseases and chronic illnesses.
- Ensure informed consent and supported decision making for PwDs, particularly persons living with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities prior to initiating any health procedures or treatments.
- Collaborate in advancing the development of specialised medications and vaccines for various disabilities, including improved availability and affordability.

²³ See World Health Organization, Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities 2023, p. 33-34, 61-68, 81, 88, 98-103, available online <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240063600>; UNFPA and Women Enabled International, The Impact of COVID-19 on Women and Girls with Disabilities: A Global Assessment and Case Studies on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Gender-Based Violence, and Related Rights, 2021, p. 2;

²⁴ World Health Organization (WHO), "Health inequities lead to early death in many persons with disabilities," 2 December 2022, available online at <https://www.who.int/news/item/02-12-2022-health-inequities-lead-to-early-death-in-many-persons-with-disabilities>

- Ensure that mainstream health schemes for physical, mental and women’s health include needs of PwDs.
- Streamline procurement of disability certificates at local levels for all including those with invisible disabilities and fluid conditions.

Environment, Climate and Disaster Response

Context

The G20 Osaka Leaders’ Declaration²⁵ commits to address disproportionate impacts of environmental disasters on vulnerable communities. As disproportionately impacted communities, PwDs must be included in mitigating climate change. However, they do not currently have access to information and inclusion on an equal basis with others. The rights of PwDs to equal protection from weather events and climate disasters is protected under UNCRPD, ICESCR, and ICCPR. The SDG targets also call for ensuring participation of PwDs in climate action and disaster risk reduction.

PwDs are particularly vulnerable to environmental and climate-driven disasters—including cyclones, floods, heat waves, and severe storms. PwDs may be less able to access warnings and emergency information, left behind during evacuation, require access to medications and assistive aids, experience greater challenges accessing basic needs, and face discrimination when resources are scarce. PwDs are also excluded from disaster risk reduction policies, plans, and programmes and therefore particularly at risk in the aftermath of disasters.²⁶

Recommendations

- Ensure that PwDs are included in environment and climate justice discussions and initiatives.
- Comply with existing commitments on climate finance, including the agreed upon and overdue \$100 billion/year climate finance commitment to support adaptation to climate

²⁵ G20 Osaka Leaders’ Declaration 2019, para. 35.

²⁶ See World Health Organization, Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities 2023, p. 82-83 available online <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240063600>; Human Rights Watch, Leave No One Behind: People with Disabilities and Older People in Climate-Related Disasters, 2022; United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs—Disability, “Disability-Inclusive Disaster Reduction and Emergency Situations, available online <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/issues/disability-inclusive-disaster-risk-reduction-and-emergency-situations.html>.

change with a 50/50 split between funding for mitigation and adaptation. This funding should prioritise the most vulnerable countries and communities, including PwDs.

- Rapidly reduce emissions, stop subsidising fossil fuels, and end new fossil fuel projects to prevent catastrophic climate outcomes and protect the rights of vulnerable populations.
- Include PwDs and their needs in design, implementation, communication and monitoring at all stages of disaster management processes, policies, plans and programmes – including during mitigation, planning and preparedness, rehabilitation and reconstruction.
 - Put rights-based mental health support at the centre of policies related to humanitarian and climate-related responses.
 - Ensure timely and appropriate health care including sanitation and hygiene, especially for WwDs, during extreme weather events and disasters.
- Invest in accessible infrastructure to ensure evacuation centres and shelter homes are accessible during disasters. Ensure reconstructed infrastructure is resilient to future hazards and accessible to PwDs.
- Collect disaggregated data on location of PwDs, their vulnerabilities and needs during extreme weather events and environmental disasters. Maintain real-time records and a digital database of PwDs for urgent disaster response and management.
- Ensure multi-stakeholder collaboration—including civil society, disabled persons organisations (DPOs), government, businesses and industry—in developing climate resilient community action-plans.

Poverty Reduction, Social Protection, and Sustainable Development

Context

The G20 Riyadh Leaders' Declaration emphasised the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable communities, committed to reducing inequalities and promoting inclusive growth, and highlighted the importance of social protection for all.²⁷ The right to social protection for PwDs is upheld by the UNCRPD²⁸ and UDHR.²⁹

²⁷ G20 Riyadh Leaders' Declaration, 2020, para. 23, 24.

²⁸ The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)(Art. 28(b) calls upon states to ensure access by persons with disabilities, in particular women and girls with disabilities and older persons with disabilities, to social protection and poverty reduction programmes.

²⁹ The need for disability-inclusive social protection is stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25 on the right to adequate standards of living and security.

PwDs are more likely to experience adverse socioeconomic outcomes than persons without disabilities, such as less education, worse health outcomes, less employment, and higher poverty rates. Accordingly, social protection is critical to support PwDs to develop more resilient livelihoods and break free from long-term poverty traps. Where social protection programmes are in place, however, PwDs currently face barriers to accessing protection, including: inaccessible procedures and centres, discrimination from programme administrators, conditional benefits, inadequate needs assessments, and lack of information on programmes, eligibility, and access pathways.³⁰

Recommendations

- Ensure access by PwDs, in particular women, girls and older PwDs, to CRPD compliant social protection and poverty reduction programmes.³¹
- Provide direct financial assistance to individuals and households in need, including through disability-specific cash transfers, pensions, targeted subsidies, employment support and incentives, means-tested benefits, and financial inclusion and counselling.
- Provide insurance protection for PwDs, including income replacement; vocational rehabilitation and job retention programmes to address unemployment; and disability insurance and rehabilitation support in case of sickness or disability related challenges.
- Provide social insurance coverage, benefits or allowances to compensate for income loss due to caregiving responsibilities incurred by caregivers, including family members of PwDs.
- Address the mental health needs of PwDs, including through access to counselling services, psychosocial support, and mental health interventions.

Inclusive Communities and Societies

Context

In order to foster inclusive communities and societies, G20 countries should take measures to remove physical, social, and attitudinal barriers that lead to the widespread exclusion of PwDs

³⁰ See World Health Organization, & World Bank. (2011). World report on disability. Malta: World Health Organization; Gooding, K., & Marriot, A. (2009). Including persons with disabilities in social cash transfer programmes in developing countries. *Journal of International Development*, 21(5), 685-698. doi: 10.1002/jid.1597; Mitra, S. (2005). *Disability and Social Safety Nets in Developing Countries*. Washington, DC: World Bank

³¹ Consistent with the UNCRPD Article 28(b)

across domains. To this end, G20 countries should promote integrated and independent living, access to assistive devices and technology, and participation of PwDs; and take urgent measures to counteract stigma, discrimination and violence.

Recommendations

- Adopt accessibility standards and Universal Design Principles in developing and retrofitting infrastructure, including: transportation systems, public buildings, housing, educational institutions, health centres, parks, sidewalks, and other essential facilities.
- Develop a time-bound plan and allocate budgets to deinstitutionalise CwDs and PwDs, through supported and independent community living options, and personalised support services.
- Set new standards and benchmarks to promote inclusive and accessible public procurement of assistive devices and technology
- Formulate a joint policy across countries for technology transfer among member and non-member countries, specifically targeting nations that lack the capability to manufacture devices and assistive technologies.
- Subsidise costs of assistive devices through grants and low interest loans.
- Allocate resources for research and development of affordable assistive devices and technology.
- Establish partnerships with start-ups and industries to develop low- and high-tech assistive tools tailored to local languages and contexts.
- End stigma by conducting awareness campaigns and programmes to promote inclusion of PwDs in social, economic, cultural, political, and community spaces.
- Encourage participation of PwDs in public discourse by ensuring that all public communication is accessible across disabilities.
- Include PwDs in leadership and decision making at all levels of local governance and civic and public life, including international policy making forums.
- Strengthen and enforce legal frameworks to end all forms of violence against PwDs.
- Provide accessible pathways to access justice, redressal mechanisms and support services, including counselling, legal assistance, and rehabilitation, to disabled survivors of violence and abuse.
- Provide training for law enforcement officers, healthcare providers, social workers, and educators on identifying and responding to discrimination and violence faced by WwDs and PwDs.
- Collect disability and gender disaggregated data on discrimination and violence against PwDs.

This Policy Brief was developed through consultations with over 2500 persons with and without disabilities across 35 countries. For extended analysis and context from this process, access full white paper [here](#).