

Building Disability-Inclusive Societies in Asia and the Pacific

ASSESSING PROGRESS OF THE
INCHEON STRATEGY



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Building Disability-Inclusive Societies in Asia and the Pacific: Assessing Progress of the Incheon Strategy is the first comprehensive report to draw on a regional database and analyze the participation of persons with disabilities in development opportunities. Using the midpoint data, it reviews the progress on different dimensions of the third Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities and offers analysis of the implementation of the Incheon Strategy to date. Our ambition is for these findings to shape measures ensuring persons with disabilities are fully empowered across all dimensions of sustainable development.

The Asia-Pacific region is home to an estimated 690 million persons with disabilities who face numerous barriers to their full participation in society. Access to education, employment, social protection and political participation can all be a challenge, and this directly affects their well-being, autonomy and dignity.

This publication identifies the following priority areas where action is particularly important.

Addressing the disproportionate rate of poverty of persons with disabilities is critical. Across the region, larger proportions of persons with disabilities live in poverty than persons without disabilities. Data are scarce, but income-based poverty among persons with disabilities appears to be more severe in higher-income economies. In the countries for which data is available, differences in poverty rates between persons with disabilities and the overall population range from 3.9 per cent to 20.6 per cent. Concerted measures are required to develop and implement comprehensive poverty reduction policy and measures for persons with disabilities, taking into consideration the multiple dimensions of poverty and social protection measures.

Greater efforts must be undertaken to provide persons with disabilities of all ages with educational and economic opportunities. In the Asia-Pacific region, at least one third of children with disabilities do not receive any early intervention services. The number of children with disabilities attending secondary education drops by over 50 per cent across the region, compared to those enrolled in primary education. As persons with disabilities transition into the labour market, they encounter significant difficulties in securing employment, especially decent jobs. Persons with disabilities are on average two to six times less likely to be employed. As the region endures changing demographic structures and a contracting working-age population, increasing the economic participation of persons with disabilities and ensuring equal pay for persons with disabilities could augment gross domestic product by up to 7 per cent.

A crucial step towards disability-inclusive development is to enable the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in the political process and in decision-making processes. Persons with disabilities are extremely underrepresented in political structures and decision-making processes. Only 0.4 per cent of national parliamentarians in the region are persons with disabilities. Policy measures to increase the meaningful representation of persons with disabilities in parliaments, political parties, national gender equality mechanisms, decision-making processes and governance at all levels are needed.

Women and girls with disabilities must be empowered to overcome the additional barriers they face in accessing development opportunities. Women and girls with disabilities in the region experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. For instance, women with disabilities have two to three times lower access to reproductive health services than women without disabilities. They account for a mere 0.1 per cent of national parliamentarians across the 17 countries and areas considered. Policymakers should consider the intersectional nature of discrimination, while designing policies for women and children with disabilities.

The rights and concerns of persons with disabilities should be well reflected in laws, policies and programmes, with due consideration given to accessibility needs. Accessible environments, information, communications and technologies for persons with diverse disabilities are a precondition for their participation in society. However, accessibility standards are typically confined to issues faced by persons with mobility impairments. Social policy coverage for persons with disabilities is as low as 28 per cent in some countries, while only eight governments in the region reported that disability perspectives are incorporated into their disaster risk reduction plans. Harmonization of national legislation with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is another necessary step to uphold the rights of persons with disabilities.

There must be a focus on collecting reliable and comparable disability data to design, implement and evaluate the effectiveness of disability-related policies and programmes. Disability prevalence reported by 57 countries and areas in the region varies significantly, from 1.1 to 24 per cent, revealing that differing definitions and data collection methods on disability greatly influence the measurement of participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities. There is an urgent need in the region to generate consensus on the definitions and methods of collecting disability statistics and thereby enhancing the reliability and comparability of such data.

In our quest for inclusive growth, we must respond to the call of the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind. Supporting and including persons with disabilities will be fundamental to translating this ambitious agenda into reality. I hope this report can support future action to tackle disability concerns and advance the sustainable development agenda across Asia and the Pacific.



Shamshad Akhtar

Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and
Executive Secretary of ESCAP

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As one of the most vulnerable and marginalized social groups, persons with disabilities — at around 690 million persons in Asia and the Pacific — continue to be at risk of exclusion from the benefits and outcomes of social, economic and environmental development in their country. Persons with disabilities face barriers to full and effective participation across all sectors of society, including employment, political participation, education and social protection.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities lays out the fundamental freedoms and human rights of persons with disabilities and empowers them to live a life with respect for their inherent dignity. The Convention underpins the Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, which is the guiding framework for disability-inclusive development in the region. Its 10 goals employ a rights-based approach to the social, economic and political inclusion of persons with disabilities, with the intent of breaking down the barriers to their full participation in society.

Because 2017 marks the midpoint of the current Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013–2022 and the implementation of the Incheon Strategy, this publication provides policymakers in the region with comprehensive data that can enhance their evidence-based policymaking for the remaining five years of the Decade. As an outcome of a survey of governments, civil society organizations and international organizations and development agencies conducted by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), this publication presents baseline data on the indicators of the Incheon Strategy. It also provides a measure of the progress made thus far in upholding the rights of persons with disabilities in development efforts across the region. The analysis therefore identifies areas in which persons with disabilities remain excluded. The intent of this work is to accelerate efforts to ensure their full participation in society by 2022 while building a resilient, sustainable and inclusive world for all.

Key findings of the midpoint review of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities reveal the following:

- **Persons with disabilities continue to face extreme poverty.** In seven countries and areas in which statistics are available, a larger proportion of persons with disabilities live in poverty than persons without disabilities. Differences in poverty rates between persons with disabilities and the overall population range from 3.9 per cent to 20.6 per cent.
- **Persons with disabilities face barriers to employment.** Employment rates of persons with disabilities tend to be lower than for persons without disabilities—persons with disabilities are on average two to six times less likely to be employed. Evidence from the region illustrates that persons with disabilities dominate in welfare-based work with low wages, corporate social responsibility projects, self-employment or in the private sector as an expendable workforce.
- **Representation and participation of persons with disabilities in decision-making remain low.** Available data show that there are only 18 parliamentarians with disabilities among a total of 4,960 parliamentarians (or the equivalent) in upper and lower houses across 17 countries and areas. The accessibility of most polling stations across the region limits the ability of persons with disabilities to vote and to vote privately.
- **Standards of accessibility vary across the region and are often not comprehensive in responding to the barriers to diverse disabilities.** Although some countries and areas report high levels of accessibility of government buildings and international airports, in many cases the concept of accessibility is confined to issues faced by persons with mobility impairments, such as wheelchair users. These buildings remain largely difficult for persons with other disabilities to navigate. The transfer of knowledge and information is also limited by inaccessible technologies and means of communication.

- **Social protection measures do not adequately cover the needs of persons with disabilities.** In some countries, coverage in government-funded health care and disability benefit programmes are as low as 30 per cent and 28 per cent, respectively.
- **Children with disabilities require additional attention.** At least one third of children with disabilities are likely to not receive any early intervention services. Children with disabilities experience barriers to participation in education that result in a 52.7 per cent drop in enrolment rate between primary school and secondary school.
- **Women and girls with disabilities experience additional barriers to participation across numerous sectors of society.** In many countries and areas, a smaller proportion of women with disabilities are employed than men with disabilities. They are also at a relative disadvantage in accessing reproductive health services, compared with their peers without disabilities, due, in part, to the absence of information concerning health care and related services in formats and language that are accessible. Even though representation of persons with disabilities in national parliaments (or equivalent) is already low, at 18 persons across the region, only five of them are women.
- **Inclusion of disability perspectives in disaster risk reduction planning and management remains low.** Only eight countries and areas in the region report having disaster risk reduction plans and strategies which reflect disability perspectives. Only nine countries and areas report that emergency shelters and disaster relief sites are designed in line with accessibility standards, with slightly more than half of this number providing data on the number of accessible shelters.
- **The availability and comparability of disability data remain a challenge.** Differing concepts of disability as well as differing approaches and methods to collecting disability data result in a lack of comparability within and between countries and areas. It also means there is a general lack of reliable data from which policy can be made. As a result, persons with disabilities and the issues that limit their full participation in society are often underrepresented and unaddressed in policymaking.
- **Upholding the rights of persons with disabilities in line with international instruments requires further work.** While 43 countries in the region are States parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, only 12 governments have enacted anti-discrimination legislation.

The outcomes of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can be enhanced through the disability-specific approaches of the Incheon Strategy. The 2030 Agenda's focus on building a resilient, sustainable and inclusive world for all relies on empowering persons at risk of being left furthest behind in the development process. Its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which seek to ensure that no one is left behind in social, economic and environmental development efforts, provide a comprehensive basis for guiding global development work in the coming years. The Incheon Strategy's cross-sectoral, rights-based approach to development can be a tool for ensuring that persons with disabilities are actively engaged and included in the implementation of the SDGs.

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