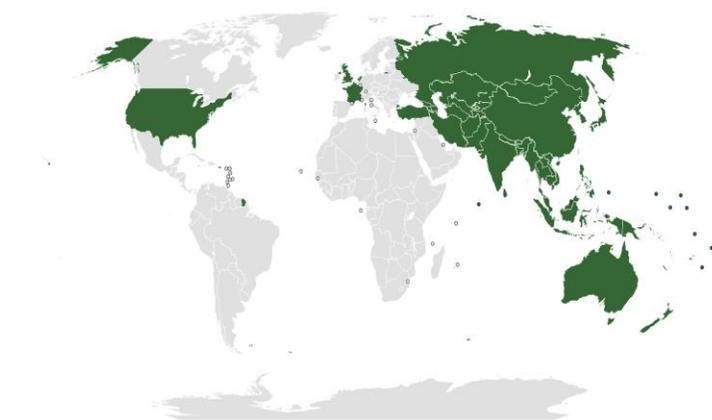


Disability Inclusion Initiative in Asia and The Pacific



Introduction- What is UNESCAP

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific includes countries that strive to “promote Cooperation among countries to achieve inclusive and sustainable development.”¹ It includes 53 nations with 9 associate members. UNESCAP was established in 1947 in Shanghai,

China. Its original members include Australia, France, China, India, The Netherlands, Pakistan, The Philippines, The Russian Federation, Thailand, The United Kingdom, and The United States.

UNESCAP’s main initiatives include ICT and natural disaster risk reduction which includes a multi-donor trust fund for “Tsunami, disaster and climate preparedness in Indian ocean and southeast asian countries.”² UNESCAP also focuses on sustainable development, energy, transportation along with economic policy and financing for development and social development. The region has made important progress in socioeconomic development. The Social Development Division (SDD) “Promotes social protection, fosters gender equality, and strengthens social inclusion of persons with disabilities, older persons, youth and migrants among others.”³ According to its website, the 2030 agenda for sustainable development includes the promotion of inclusivity for all and providing “normative support and regional dialogue, policy advocacy, research and analysis, and technical support, advisory services and capacity building.”⁴

Disability Inclusion Background

In Asia and the Pacific, 15% of the region’s population—690 million people—live with some form of disability. Major causes for these disabilities include natural disasters, chronic health conditions, traffic injuries, poor working conditions and other factors. However, this number is expected to rise in the next decades as the Asia-Pacific region sees its population begin to rapidly age. The number is expected to rise over the next decades as a combined effect of population ageing.⁵ By 2050, China will

¹ “Our Work.” *United Nations ESCAP*. www.unescap.org/our-work.

² “ICT and Disaster Risk Reduction.” *United Nations ESCAP* www.unescap.org/our-work/ict-disaster-risk-reduction.

³ “Social Development.” *United Nations ESCAP* www.unescap.org/our-work/social-development.

⁴ “2030 Agenda Overview.” *United Nations ESCAP* www.unescap.org/2030-agenda.

⁵ “Disability-Inclusive Development.” *United Nations ESCAP*. www.unescap.org/our-work/social-development/disability/about.

have over 330 million people over the age of 65.⁶ Such a large number of elderly people will place a large burden on the social welfare systems across the region, making it more difficult to care for young and middle aged people with disabilities as money will become increasingly spread thin.



UNESCAP recognizes the issues and constant barriers that disabled people face. These barriers include the lack of ability to work, receive a proper education, and social services and legal support. Disabled people are much more likely to be subject to poverty than an able person in Asian and Pacific economies. It is also recognized that there is a continuous negative stereotype that follows disabled people which “prevents them from exercising their rights and fulfilling

their responsibilities as equal members of society.”⁷ These effects, when they come together, contribute to a series of systematic barriers that those with disabilities are constantly fighting against.

Both the United Nations in general and UNESCAP are making significant strides towards inclusion. In 2018, The United Nations adopted 17 new sustainable development goals. The theme is “Empowering persons with disabilities and ensuring inclusiveness and equality.” The disability inclusion goals include quality education, decent work and economic growth, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, and peace, justice, and strong institutions.⁸ But the United Nations has worked on the issue of inclusion even earlier, passing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006.⁹ The convention seeks to advance the interests of those with disabilities (which is broadly defined in the document to be as inclusive as possible); as well as help promote integration and a reduction of stigma towards those with disabilities.

Working Group on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013-2022

Currently, there is a working group of Asian and Pacific nations to “provide technical advice and support to ESCAP members and associate members, to promote the full and effective implementation of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013-2022.” The group is composed of 15 ESCAP member nations and 15 civil society organizations. In 2010, ESCAP launched a campaign

⁶ “China’s aging population is a major threat to its future.” *Time*. <https://time.com/5523805/china-aging-population-working-age/>.

⁷ “Disability-Inclusive Development.” *United Nations ESCAP*. www.unescap.org/our-work/social-development/disability/about.

⁸ “International Day of Persons with Disabilities.” *United Nations*. www.un.org/en/events/disabilitiesday/.

⁹ “Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.” *United Nations*. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>.

titled “Make the Right Real!” This campaign uses the Incheon Strategy to attempt to achieve 10 goals in improving the lives of people with disabilities. These goals include the reduction of poverty, promoting political participation, enhancement of accessibilities, addition of social protection, enhance early intervention for children with disabilities, enhance gender equality within disabled people, inclusion in disaster risk strategies, strengthen disability data, better implement the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Disabled people, and enhance regional cooperation.

The Incheon Strategy

The Incheon Strategy was developed in Incheon, South Korea when discussing how to implement the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons 2003-2012. The strategy allows the region of Asia and the Pacific to improve overall quality of life for people with disabilities and ensure their rights as many are currently living in poverty. The Incheon strategy is composed of 10 goals and 27 targets that are based on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Biwako Millennium Framework.¹⁰

Barriers for people with disabilities

While there are over 4,000 parliamentarians in Asia and the Pacific, only 18 have some form of disability, making political representation low. Because of low political representation, disabled people rarely have access to private and accessible voting.¹¹ This lack of visibility for those with disabilities and the lack of a seat at the decision-making table, make it difficult for those with disabilities to enact effective policies that will materially change and improve their lives. Ensuring that those with disabilities have a seat at the table is a crucial first step to ensure lasting change. However, even in more liberal societies, electing individuals with disabilities is difficult due to stigmas against those with disabilities. In this sense, political change and power may not be possible until a cultural or societal change occurs.

Poverty rates are also significantly higher for people with disabilities, the average poverty rate for people without disabilities is around 3%, and is above 20% for people with disabilities. This high of a poverty rate is most likely due to the fact that disabled people are 2-6x more likely to be unemployed than people without disabilities.¹² Because of the high poverty levels and the low employment rates, many disabled people rely on the government for healthcare. However, government funded healthcare and disability benefit programs are only about 30% effective in covering the needs of disabled people. Most countries in the region also do not have laws against the discrimination of disabled people. Out of the 43 countries that have signed the Convention on The Rights of Disabled People, only 12 have implemented laws against discrimination.¹³ Moreover, even in countries with generous benefits for those with disabilities, when budget cuts need to be made, they are often made on programs for those with disabilities.

¹⁰ “Incheon Strategy to ‘Make the Right Real’ for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific.” *PreventionWeb.net*. www.preventionweb.net/publications/view/34904.

¹¹ “Building Disability-Inclusive Societies in Asia and the Pacific.” *UNESCAP*. <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/publications/SDD%20BDIS%20report%20A4%20v14-5-E.pdf>.

¹² Ibid pg.8

¹³ Ibid pg.8

Factors such as lack of accessibility to government buildings also need to be accounted for. Many government and health buildings in the Asia-Pacific region are not accessible for those with disabilities. Public transportation in the region is also heavily lacking in accessibility for physically disabled people.¹⁴ The lack of mobility for those with disabilities means that even when services are available, it can be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, for the disabled to access these services. Only 8 countries in the region have established an effective plan for disaster risk reduction that includes the needs of disabled people; and 9 countries have shelters that are equipped with some form of adequate accessibility in the event of an emergency.

Women and Girls with Disabilities

According to the Report of the UN ESCAP Workshop on Women and Disability, 80% of women with a disability must be dependent on other people for their care and have little to no independence. Also the report states that “women are less likely than men to make use of many other existing social services, including residential services, due to social, cultural and religious factors.”¹⁵ Due to these factors, a speaker during the workshop concluded that disabled women are one of the most marginalized groups, “They are overrepresented in poverty and face the greatest incidence of disadvantage.”¹⁶ Women are more likely than men with disabilities to live in poverty and girls with disabilities are less likely than boys to receive a proper education. This group tends to go unrecognized because people with disabilities are usually grouped together, rather than recognizing the gender division in marginalized groups.

Case Study

Disability Inclusive Governance in Indonesia

Over the past years, Indonesia’s economy has had steady growth in a positive direction. The GDP per capita of the country has gone from \$807 in 2000 to \$3,877 in 2018.¹⁷ This means less citizens are living in poverty overall; however, many of the disabled population still live in poverty. In all nations, disabled women are more likely to live in poverty than disabled men because “poverty is linked to their very limited opportunities for education and skills development.”¹⁸ In Indonesia there are over 11,000,000 people living with some form of a disability. There are “3,474,035 people with a visual impairment, 3,010,830 people with a physical impairment, 2,547,626 people with a hearing impairment, 1,389,614 people with a mental impairment and 1,158,012 people with chronic impairment.”¹⁹

¹⁴ Ibid pg.7

¹⁵ Final Report of the UN ESCAP Workshop on ... - Wwda.org.au. <http://wwda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/unescapwwd1.doc>.

¹⁶ Ibid pg.3

¹⁷ “Indonesia Overview.” *World Bank*. www.worldbank.org/en/country/indonesia/overview.

¹⁸ “Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Indonesia.” *International Labour Organization*. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-jakarta/documents/publication/wcms_233427.pdf.

¹⁹ Ibid

In November of 2017, 14 mayors in Indonesia signed the “Charter of the Network of Indonesian Mayors for Inclusive Cities in Indonesia.”²⁰ By signing this initiative, mayors in Indonesia vowed to encourage inclusion in their respective cities which would in turn reduce the poverty rates of people with disabilities.²¹ Cities in Indonesia are making infrastructure and social facilities more easily accessible and developing better education and healthcare in order to accommodate a multitude of needs. Overall, Indonesia has been working positively towards promoting a more inclusive society in their cities through local government.

But more work remains to be done in Indonesia. In Jakarta, the city’s transit system is notoriously inaccessible to those with physical and visual disabilities.²² While improvements have recently been made, such as the addition of tactile pavement around tracks in stations, it is still not enough. One blind individual must regularly rely on the help of a security guard or other passengers to board the train.²³ While it is nice that people are willing to help him board the train, it is still a humiliating experience that, in some ways, contributes to negative views of those with disabilities as annoying or a burden. Despite estimates that only .0006% of Jakarta’s population is disabled, a study of 10 train stations found that none of them were accessible.

Questions to Consider

- What can UNESCAP do to create more accessible areas?
- How can UNESCAP promote political participation and include more disabled people in politics?
- How can UNESCAP promote inclusivity and lower the poverty rate for disabled people?
- How can stigmas against those with disabilities be reduced?

²⁰ “Towards Inclusive Cities in Indonesia.” *International Labour Organization*.

www.ilo.org/jakarta/info/public/pr/WCMS_593078/lang--en/index.htminclusion%20of%20persons%20with%20disabilities.

²¹ Ibid.

²² “Are Jakarta Public Transport OK for Commuters with Disability?” *Global Indonesia Voices*.

<https://www.globalindonesianvoices.com/32751/are-jakarta-public-transport-ok-for-commuters-with-disability/>.

²³ “It’s Way Too Hard to Get Around Jakarta When You’re Disabled.” *Vice*.

https://www.vice.com/en_asia/article/yweqd7/getting-around-jakarta-is-a-big-challenge-when-youre-disabled.