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High-level Intergovernmental Meeting on the Final Review of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013–2022

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Item 2 and 3 of the provisional agenda*

Review of progress and challenges in the implementation of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013–2022, and the Incheon Strategy to "Make the Right Real" for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific

Forward-looking policies and strategies for disability-inclusive development in Asia and the Pacific during the period to 2030, focusing on key and emerging regional issues and opportunities

Implementation of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013–2022: key achievements, priorities and challenges

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Asia-Pacific region have been global leaders in promoting disability-inclusive development for the past 30 years. As the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013–2022, comes to an end, ESCAP, its members and associate members, organizations of persons with disabilities and other stakeholders are taking stock of the implementation of the Decade and charting a path forward for the coming decade, in alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The present document contains a summary of achievements, challenges and priorities for disability-inclusive development as reported by countries and territories in the Asia-Pacific region. The responses were gathered through the voluntary national survey on the final review of the implementation of the Decade. Country examples from reliable secondary sources were used to supplement the survey responses.

Although there have been achievements with regard to the full inclusion of persons with disabilities, barriers and challenges remain. Governments are committed to continuing to work towards inclusion, with the most commonly reported future priorities being work and employment; disability statistics; and access to knowledge, information and communications technology. Members and associate members of the Commission are encouraged to take whole-of-government and all-of-society approaches to further advance disability-inclusive development.

In view of the achievements, challenges and priorities with regard to the implementation of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, members and associate members of the Commission may wish to deliberate on the topics addressed in the present document.

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I. Introduction

1. Asia and the Pacific is home to more than 700 million persons with disabilities who face significant barriers to full and effective participation in society.[1] The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) was the first regional commission in the world to proclaim a regional decade focusing on disability-inclusive development, in follow-up to the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, 1983–1992. During the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993–2002 and the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 2003–2012, ESCAP helped to shift the view of persons with disabilities to include them as rights holders and created a regional draft that laid the initial foundation for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

2. To realize the regional vision of inclusive development that upholds the rights of all persons with disabilities, members and associate members of the Commission proclaimed the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013–2022, and adopted the Incheon Strategy to "Make the Right Real" for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, which comprised the world's first disability-specific development goals. Further, the Beijing Declaration, including the Action Plan to Accelerate the Implementation of the Incheon Strategy, was adopted to provide strategic guidance on disability-inclusive development.

3. As the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013–2022 concludes, there is a need for governments, persons with disabilities and other stakeholders to take stock of the progress made and to chart the way forward for a new phase of disability-inclusive development in the region. To assess the progress, ESCAP completed an analytical review and held consultation meetings. As part of the review, a voluntary national survey was disseminated to members and associate members in August 2021. The aim of the survey was to gather information on the overall progress made towards realizing disability rights and inclusion across the region. A total of 31 countries and territories submitted responses to the survey.[2]

4. The present document contains a summary of the findings of the survey, based primarily on government-identified achievements, challenges and priorities for disability-inclusive development. It also contains a brief overview of the institutional settings and legal framework for advancing disability rights and inclusion in the region. Secondary desk research was conducted to collect and analyse data from other reliable sources and to supplement the survey responses.

[1] Calculated as 15 per cent of the estimated regional population at mid-2021 by ESCAP. See World Health Organization (WHO) and World Bank, *World Report on Disability* (Geneva, WHO, 2011); and ESCAP, "2021 ESCAP population data sheet", available at www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/knowledge-products/Pop_data_sheet2021_20211230.pdf (accessed on 21 April 2022).

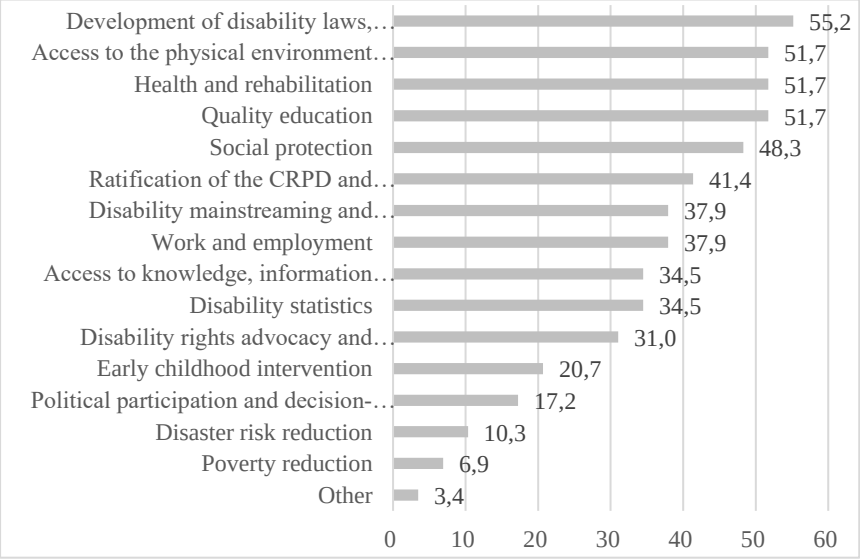
[2] Azerbaijan; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Brunei Darussalam; Cambodia; China; Cook Islands; Fiji; French Polynesia; Hong Kong, China; India; Indonesia; Japan; Kyrgyzstan; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Malaysia; Maldives; Marshall Islands; Mongolia; Nauru; Pakistan; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Singapore; Tajikistan; Thailand; Tonga; Türkiye; Uzbekistan; and Vanuatu.

II. Overview of achievements and challenges in advancing disability-inclusive development

A. Key achievements

5. In response to the voluntary national survey, 29 countries and territories listed their achievements in disability-inclusive development during the Decade. Achievements were reported in the areas of development of disability laws, policies, strategies and programmes (55.2 per cent of respondents), access to the physical environment and transportation (51.7 per cent), health and rehabilitation (51.7 per cent), quality education (51.7 per cent), social protection (48.3 per cent), ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and harmonization of national legislation with the Convention (41.4 per cent), disability mainstreaming and coordination within government (37.9 per cent), work and employment (37.9 per cent), access to knowledge, information and communications technology (34.5 per cent), disability statistics (34.5 per cent), and disability rights advocacy and awareness-raising (31.0 per cent) (figure I). The following paragraphs include information on the detailed achievements of countries and territories in the Asia-Pacific region.[3]

Figure I
Achievements in disability-inclusive development reported by 29 countries and territories
(Percentage)



Abbreviation: CRPD, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

1. Poverty reduction

6. Disability and poverty can be closely interlinked. Persons with disabilities encounter barriers to effective participation in life socially and economically and face extra costs of living with a disability, which can increase the risk of being trapped in or falling back into poverty. Persons living in poverty are also likely to acquire disability due to factors such as malnutrition,

[3] Unless otherwise specified, country examples are sourced from responses to the voluntary national survey.

unsafe living and working conditions, and lack of access to health care.[4] Across the region, persons with disabilities generally experience a higher poverty rate than persons without disabilities. Poverty reduction plays a vital role in ensuring persons with disabilities can have an adequate standard of living. Many countries and territories in Asia and the Pacific have launched poverty reduction programmes for persons with disabilities and achieved positive results.

7. In China, more than 7 million registered poor persons with disabilities were lifted out of poverty in a five-year period through the "two assurances and three guarantees" strategy. The strategy aimed to provide persons with disabilities living in poverty with adequate food and clothing and guarantee their access to compulsory education, basic medical services and safe housing.[5] In Pakistan, the aim of the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund Strategy 2021–2025 is to lift 75 per cent of households with persons with disabilities in Strategy-supported programmes out of poverty. Two projects specifically targeted deaf persons and persons with physical disabilities, with interventions such as capacity-building for participants with disabilities, teacher training and provision of assistive devices.[6]

2. Social protection

8. Enhancing social protection, including access to health care, is critical for persons with disabilities, as they face additional disability-related costs and may not be able to maintain the formal employment required to access contributory benefits. In many countries, mainstream social protection schemes are often inadequate, inaccessible or unavailable for persons with disabilities. In addition, concepts such as incapacity and unemployability still constitute key elements of the eligibility criteria for disability benefits.[7] Some governments have worked to improve access to social protection programmes, health care and community services for persons with disabilities and their caregivers.

9. In Brunei Darussalam, the disability allowance is compatible with the old-age pension, according to the Old Age and Disability Pension Act (Amendment) Order, 2021. In addition, a new monthly benefit was introduced for caregivers of persons with disabilities. In French Polynesia, starting in 2020, persons with disabilities could continue to receive part of the disability allowance when employed, supporting their skills development. Previously, people lost their disability allowance after obtaining employment. In Georgia, almost all registered persons with disabilities receive a universal disability benefit, regardless of their income or capacity to work, and have a higher tax-free income threshold. Furthermore, eligible persons with disabilities can access assistive devices at no or subsidized costs. As a family member of a

[4] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Policy Guidelines for Inclusive Sustainable Development Goals: No Poverty* (Geneva, 2020).

[5] China Disabled Persons' Federation, "Build a well-off society in an all-round way, leaving no one behind: an exhibition of achievements in poverty alleviation for people with disabilities" (Beijing, 2021).

[6] Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund, *Re-imagining the Future: 2021 Annual Report* (Islamabad, 2021).

[7] ESCAP, "How to design disability-inclusive social protection" (Bangkok, 2021).

poor household, a person with a disability is also entitled to a share of targeted social assistance.[8]

10. In Azerbaijan, the Government created the disability subsystem, an electronic disability assessment system, to move the determination of disability status online. The system improves objectivity and transparency in the determination process and allows citizens to easily access the results. In addition, a project of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population revised the disability assessment criteria, aimed at shifting from the medical model of disability to the social and human rights models. In Uzbekistan, the Government established a new information system, the Single Registry of Social Protection, in 2019. It serves as an online inter-agency government data transfer network to improve efficiencies in administering disability benefits.[9]

11. In the Philippines, the Government enacted a law in 2019 making mandatory PhilHealth coverage for persons with disabilities possible. The law mandated PhilHealth, a health insurance scheme providing universal health coverage, to develop packages that address the specific health needs of persons with disabilities. In Thailand, the universal health coverage Gold Card was issued for persons with disabilities, as part of the universal health coverage scheme. With the Gold Card, persons with disabilities can receive standard medical services, rehabilitation services, assistive equipment and capacity development training.

12. In Hong Kong, China community support services are provided to persons with disabilities to address their diverse needs and facilitate their full inclusion in the community. The government provides funding to non-governmental organizations, which offer training in community living skills, professional rehabilitation services and social networking support, among others. Training and support services are also available for family members and caregivers of persons with disabilities to strengthen their caring capacity. In Tajikistan, the community-based rehabilitation approach has been fully adopted, with projects being implemented by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population in partnership with civil society organizations through a public-private partnership model.[10]

3. Employment

13. Productive employment and decent work lie at the centre of poverty reduction and social inclusion of persons with disabilities. While there is a fundamental shift in policy focus from sheltered employment to supported and open employment, persons with disabilities often fare worse than their peers without disabilities in the labour market.[11] Besides strengthening legal

[8] *Disability at a Glance 2021: The Shaping of Disability-Inclusive Employment in Asia and the Pacific* (United Nations publication, 2021); and International Labour Organization (ILO), *Assessment of the Social Protection System in Georgia* (Geneva, 2020).

[9] Asian Development Bank (ADB), "Disability and social protection in Asia", ADB Briefs No. 203 (December, 2021).

[10] United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, "End of project report: building and strengthening alliances for inclusive policies and communities for persons with disabilities in Tajikistan" (n.p., n.d.). Available at www.unprpd.org/sites/default/files/library/2019-06/Tajikistan-web.pdf (accessed on 2 August 2022).

[11] *Disability at a Glance 2021*.

frameworks to address discrimination and barriers to employment, some governments have enhanced vocational training and employment services and developed a close collaboration with employers, service providers, technical and vocational education and training institutions and organizations of persons with disabilities to support workers and entrepreneurs with disabilities.

14. In Bangladesh, the Directorate of Technical Education under the Ministry of Education established the Disability Inclusion Advisory Group to guide disability-inclusive policymaking and the implementation of such measures in technical and vocational education and training institutions. A number of memorandums of understanding were signed between vocational education and training institutions and organizations of persons with disabilities to implement the 5 per cent enrolment target for persons with disabilities.[12] In Vanuatu, the Government developed the National Disability Inclusion Policy for the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Sector 2016–2020 to mainstream disability inclusion into vocational education and training sector planning. The policy highlighted measures such as supporting service providers in offering inclusive and accessible training to persons with disabilities, conducting awareness-raising and outreach activities to encourage the enrolment of persons with disabilities and providing funding to facilitate reasonable accommodation.[13]

15. In the Republic of Korea, the Korea Employment Agency for Persons with Disabilities, under the Ministry of Employment and Labour, partners with the private sector to support persons with disabilities in obtaining and sustaining employment. It provides services such as employment counselling and planning, vocational competency development, job placement and personal assistance services, among others. In responding to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the fourth industrial revolution, the agency now focuses on job security, job diversification and productivity enhancement for persons with disabilities. Moreover, the Government enacted the Act on the Facilitation of Entrepreneurial Activities of Persons with Disabilities to support business start-ups and entrepreneurial activities of persons with disabilities. In Viet Nam, a network of mainstream employment service centres across provinces provides job counselling, employment referral, job placement services and job fairs for persons with disabilities.[14]

4. Early intervention and education

16. Children with disabilities in the Asia-Pacific region continue to lack access to early childhood intervention as well as primary and secondary school. Early identification and intervention programmes recognize the right of children with disabilities to develop their full potential in all aspects of life. Quality and inclusive education provides a path by which persons with disabilities can break away from poverty, actively engage in their communities and acquire skills to advocate for themselves and avoid exploitation.[15] Furthermore, education sets a norm of inclusion for all children from an early age, paving a path for inclusion throughout the life cycle. Efforts have been made across the region to improve early identification and intervention,

[12] ILO, “Good practices for inclusion of persons with disabilities: a replication guide for technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions”, brochure, 1 November 2017.

[13] Vanuatu, Ministry of Education and Training, *National Disability Inclusion Policy for the TVET Sector, 2016–2020* (Port Vila, 2015).

[14] *Disability at a Glance 2021*.

[15] See CRPD/C/GC/4.

develop accessible learning environments, and build the capacity of teachers and education personnel for inclusive education.

17. In Papua New Guinea, disability screening has been integrated into the Education Management Information System through the Education Management Information System Disability Disaggregated Toolkit. The Toolkit is designed for use by teachers to screen for indicators of disability among their students.[16] In Singapore, government-funded programmes aid children under 7 years of age with different levels of developmental needs to gain skills that maximize their capacity for independence. In 2021, the Government launched a new inclusive support programme pilot to integrate early childhood and early intervention services at preschools for children aged 3 to 6 who require a medium level of early intervention support.

18. In Bhutan, the Government's special education needs programme has the long-term objective of ensuring that all children with disabilities have access to general education in mainstream schools. The 2019 Ten-Year Road Map for Inclusive and Special Education addresses a number of barriers to achieving fully inclusive education by providing capacity-building for teachers and resource centres and equitable access to education, expanding awareness of disability-related services such as early identification and intervention, and developing and maintaining data collection systems on children with disabilities.[17] In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, under the Education and Sports Sector Development Plan (2016–2020), a system of continuous professional development for inclusive education is expected to equip teachers with pedagogical skills to address the diverse learning needs of students, including children with disabilities. More efforts, however, are needed to accelerate implementation of the plan.[18]

5. Gender equality and women's empowerment

19. Women and girls with disabilities often face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination on the grounds of gender and disability. They often experience gender-related risk factors, such as lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services, gender-based violence and gender-biased intra-household distribution of resources.[19] Some pilot initiatives aim to address these issues.

20. Since 2015, the biennial Cook Islands National Women's Conference has included an agenda item on women and girls with disabilities. In addition, the government developed the Strategic Plan of Action (2018–2022) of the Cook Islands Women and Girls with Disabilities Organization, a support group for women and girls with disabilities.[20] In Fiji, the Pacific Disability Forum

[16] ESCAP, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), "Early intervention and quality education of children with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific", Policy Paper (Bangkok, 2021).

[17] Ibid.

[18] UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and Education – All Means All* (Paris, 2020).

[19] United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), "Making the SDGs count for women and girls with disabilities", issue brief (New York, 2017).

[20] Cook Islands, Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Cook Islands Disability-Inclusive Development Policy: Rights, Responsibilities, Action, 2020–2025* (Avarua, 2019);

and the Fiji Disabled People's Federation, both organizations of persons with disabilities, worked with the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation and the Regional Rights Resource Team of the Pacific Community to create a toolkit on recognizing and preventing gender-based violence against women with disabilities. The toolkit was created after consultations with persons with disabilities, their family members and community members throughout Fiji. The toolkit has been used to train legal personnel and justice officials.[21]

6. Political participation and decision-making

21. Inclusive political participation enables persons with disabilities to fulfil their responsibilities as members of society and influence decision-making processes, ensuring the voices and views of persons with disabilities can be heard and represented. Persons with disabilities, especially persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, [22] are commonly underrepresented in political and public life. Several governments in the region have promoted the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in government bodies and electoral processes through means such as affirmative action and the provision of reasonable accommodation.

22. In Malaysia, in 2019, one person with a disability was elected as a new member of the Public Services Commission, reflecting the Government's commitment to promoting the employment of persons with disabilities in the public sector. In Mongolia, a person with a disability was appointed as an advisor to the social sector of the Cabinet of the Prime Minister and now works with diverse ministries, state organizations and some parliament members.

23. In Timor-Leste, although there is still room for improvement, progress has been made in addressing some barriers to voting by persons with disabilities. The proportion of monitored polling stations with ramps increased from 20 per cent in the 2017 parliamentary elections to 55 per cent in the 2018 early parliamentary elections. The election administration bodies engaged closely with Ra'es Hadomi Timor Oan, a national organization of persons with disabilities, in the 2018 early parliamentary elections. The Technical Secretariat for Electoral Administration invited Ra'es Hadomi Timor Oan officials to election staff training sessions, and the organization developed a public service announcement for the National Electoral Commission.[23]

7. Accessibility

24. Accessibility is a prerequisite for inclusive societies, and access to the built environment and transportation is an integral part of accessibility rights. Physical accessibility for all is yet to be achieved in the region. The inadequacy and lack of accessible built environments and transportation are fundamental

and OHCHR, "Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women considers reports of the Cook Islands", press release, 13 July 2018.

[21] United Nations Population Fund, *Young Persons with Disabilities: Global Study on Ending Gender-Based Violence, and Realising Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights* (New York, 2018).

[22] United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) and Inclusion International, *Political Participation of Persons with Intellectual or Psychosocial Disabilities* (New York, UNDP, 2021).

[23] Ra'es Hadomi Timor Oan, "Timor-Leste 2018 early parliamentary elections: disability access monitoring" (Dili, 2018).

barriers that widen inequalities between persons with and without disabilities in all aspects of political, economic, social and cultural life. Many governments have invested in physical accessibility and applied concepts such as universal design, reasonable accommodation and seamless connectivity.[24]

25. In India, the nationwide Accessible India Campaign, launched in 2015, aims to achieve universal accessibility. As of 2021, accessibility audits had been conducted for 1,662 buildings in 48 cities. Moreover, all 35 international airports and 55 out of 69 domestic airports, as well as all 709 A1, A and B category railway stations, had accessibility features such as ramps and accessible toilets.[25] In Cambodia, promoting accessibility is a joint effort of the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction and the Ministry of Cults and Religions; together they issued an interministerial declaration, guidelines on physical accessibility and information letters.

26. The accessibility of knowledge, information and communications technology is a fundamental component of building inclusive societies and lays a foundation for persons with disabilities in terms of socioeconomic participation, lifelong learning and access to essential services.[26] The uneven digital inclusion across the region suggests that many persons with disabilities are at risk of being excluded in an increasingly digitalized society. To address the disability digital divide, some governments have worked to enhance the digital skills of persons with disabilities and improve the accessibility of technology products and information.

27. In Indonesia, under the national digital literacy programme, training was provided to persons with disabilities at national and local levels to increase their participation in the process of digitalization. In Australia, all government agencies are required to conform to the Digital Service Standard of the Digital Transformation Agency. The standard requires that government websites comply with the level AA standard of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (version 2.0) promulgated by the World Wide Web Consortium. Moreover, online government services designed or redesigned after 6 May 2016 have to be accessible to all users.[27]

8. Disaster risk reduction

28. The Asia-Pacific region is prone to disasters,[28] and those disasters disproportionately affect persons with disabilities. The mortality rate of persons with disabilities is two to four times higher than that of persons without

[24] *Disability at a Glance 2019: Investing in Accessibility in Asia and the Pacific – Strategic Approaches to Achieving Disability-Inclusive Sustainable Development* (United Nations publication, 2019).

[25] India, Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, *Annual Report of the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities for the Year 2021–22* (New Delhi, 2022).

[26] International Telecommunication Union (ITU), *Towards Building Inclusive Digital Communities: ITU Toolkit and Self-Assessment for ICT Accessibility Implementation* (Geneva, 2021).

[27] See CRPD/C/AUS/2-3.

[28] *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2021: Resilience in a Riskier World – Managing Systemic Risks from Biological and other Natural Hazards* (United Nations publication, 2021).

disabilities in many disaster situations.[29] Ensuring disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction is central to mitigating the negative impact of disasters on the general population and, in particular, on persons with disabilities. Some governments in the region have successfully mainstreamed disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction into legal frameworks and institutional settings. They strengthened the participation of organizations of persons with disabilities in policymaking and improved the accessibility of infrastructure and communications.

29. In Japan, the 2013 revised Basic Act on Disaster Management recognizes that persons with disabilities need additional care in disaster situations. Mayors of municipalities must obtain information on persons who have difficulty in evacuating by themselves and provide support when a disaster occurs or is likely to occur. The 2013 revised Cabinet Order for Enforcement of the Basic Act on Disaster Management further requires that facilities at designated shelters and support services be accessible to persons with disabilities. In some municipalities such as Ota City, Tokyo, regular meetings with organizations of persons with disabilities, municipality policymakers, council members, academia and local practitioners of disaster risk reduction and management are organized to ensure disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction policymaking and programming.[30] In New Zealand, disaster services such as emergency call centres are accessible to persons with disabilities. A specific call centre has been established to address the needs of persons with disabilities and refer them to appropriate services. In addition, a unit of officers who use sign language has been set up among firefighters.[31]

9. Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and harmonization of national legislation with the Convention

30. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was the first disability-specific, internationally binding legal instrument, representing a paradigm shift from the deficit-based biomedical model of disability to a social or human rights model. In the Convention, persons with disabilities are recognized as rights holders and States parties are obliged to prohibit all discrimination and guarantee to persons with disabilities equal and effective legal protection against discrimination on all grounds. While ratification of the Convention and harmonization of national legislation with the Convention does not always lead to immediate changes in the daily lives of persons with disabilities, they are important first steps toward inclusion.

31. To ensure the effective implementation of the Convention, some governments have conducted legislative reviews and harmonized their national laws with the Convention. In Armenia, the 2021 law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is a positive example of the legislative review process leading to amendments in line with the Convention. Following ratification of the Convention in 2010, in a 2017 dialogue with the Convention Committee, the

[29] Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and others, *Disability-Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction: An Urgent Global Imperative* (Tokyo, University of Tokyo Komaba Organization for Educational Excellence, 2019).

[30] ESCAP, "Review of disability-inclusive and gender-responsive disaster risk reduction in Asia and the Pacific", background paper prepared for the Regional Consultation on Facilitating Innovative Action on Disability-Inclusive and Gender-Responsive Disaster Risk Reduction in Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, May 2022.

[31] Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and others, *Disability-Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction*.

Committee pointed out inconsistencies between the Convention and the draft law. The draft law was revised to incorporate the concept, principles and definitions of the Convention, including prohibiting disability-based discrimination and refusal to provide reasonable accommodation. In the Marshall Islands, the parliament worked to align the Motor Traffic (Disabled Parking) Act 2007, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2015, the Human Rights Committee Act 2015, the Child Rights Protection Act 2015 and the Senior Citizens Act 2018 with the Convention. In Türkiye, Act No. 5378 on persons with disabilities was revised in 2014 to align with the requirements of the Convention. The revision included definitions of terms such as disability-based discrimination, reasonable accommodation and accessibility.

32. Further reflecting governments' commitments to accelerating disability-inclusive development, some countries developed relevant laws, strategies and programmes on disability inclusion. In Kyrgyzstan, disability inclusion is prioritized in its National Development Strategy until 2040 and the National Development Programme until 2026. The Government is also developing a national programme entitled "Inclusive Country" to enhance disability-inclusive environments, institutions and services from 2021 to 2024.[32] In Nepal, the Disability Rights Act of 2017, in line with a rights-based approach to disability, recognizes the principles of the Convention and acknowledges the intersectionality of disability and other identities.[33] The Act stipulates that denial of reasonable accommodation is a form of disability discrimination. In the Russian Federation, the Government approved the State programme entitled "Accessible Environment" in 2019, aiming to address the needs of persons with disabilities through an integrated approach.

10. Disability data

33. Adequate, reliable, and comparable data disaggregated by disability status, sex, geographic location and other characteristics are essential for evidence-based policymaking and programming. Many countries in the Asia-Pacific region face challenges in producing disability statistics. Persons with disabilities are often underrepresented or excluded from official data, due to the failure to include instruments in data collections that allow disability disaggregation and the absence of accommodation strategies to ensure the participation of persons with disabilities in censuses, surveys and other data collection processes.[34] However, some governments have invested in collecting and using disability data for policymaking and service delivery.

34. In Maldives, the Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2019 used the Washington Group short set of questions on functioning. Drawing on disability-disaggregated data, the Government aimed to examine the different characteristics of persons with disabilities and identify the barriers and inequalities they experience. The Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services was working to develop a comprehensive register of persons with disabilities to inform policymaking and programming.[35] In Nauru, the

[32] ILO, Social Protection and Public Finance Management, "Kyrgyzstan". Available at https://socialprotection-pfm.org/partner-countries/kyrgyztan/.

[33] OHCHR, "Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities reviews the report of Nepal", press release, 20 February 2018.

[34] UNICEF, "Producing disability-inclusive data: why it matters and what it takes" (New York, 2020).

[35] Maldives, National Bureau of Statistics, "Defining disability measurement" in *Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2019* (Male, 2020).

Washington Group short set of questions on functioning were included in the 2019 Nauru mini-census questionnaire to collect information for sound decision-making.[36] In Tonga, the Government completed a countrywide survey to assess the barriers and vulnerabilities children and adults with disabilities face. The survey used the Washington Group extended set of questions on functioning to complement the data already available from the census' inclusion of the Washington Group short set of questions on functioning. The survey findings covered prevalence of disability; living conditions; education; economic activity; awareness, needs and use of services; and participation and accessibility, among other aspects.[37]

11. Cooperation

35. The achievements of the first two Asian and Pacific Decades of Disabled Persons highlighted the importance of subregional, regional and interregional cooperation. Over the course of the present Decade, with funding support from Australia, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea, as well as from the Nippon Foundation and Rehabilitation International, ESCAP has provided technical assistance to several governments and civil society organizations in the region.

36. In support of building an accessible environment for all, ESCAP has assisted 15 countries and territories and other entities in formulating action plans to improve the accessibility of the built environment and public transport. Technical guidance has also been provided to the Government of Thailand to ensure accessibility standards relating to goods and services are applied in public procurement processes. Furthermore, to strengthen the capacity of governments to produce quality disability data, ESCAP developed partnerships with disability focal points in 17 countries. National stakeholder consultations were held to assess disability data gaps and increase awareness of the Incheon Strategy and the Washington Group set of questions on functioning.

37. To support the development of disability-inclusive employment and social protection systems, ESCAP is currently assisting the Government of Bhutan in mainstreaming disability perspectives into relevant policies and programmes. ESCAP is supporting the provincial government of Batangas, Philippines, in enhancing disability assessment tools to increase access to social protection benefits and other services for persons with disabilities. To facilitate inclusive disaster risk reduction and management, ESCAP is supporting national and local policymakers in incorporating disability and gender perspectives into disaster risk reduction policies and measures.

38. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, ESCAP has collaborated with civil society organizations, including organizations of persons with disabilities, in five countries (Bangladesh, China, India, Malaysia and Thailand) to advance disability rights and inclusion during the pandemic and beyond. Essential support and services, such as community-based mental health counselling, vocational skills training and assistance in accessing social protection

[36] Statistics for Development Division, Pacific Community, "Disability in Nauru" (Noumea, n.d.). Available from the Disability in Nauru section of the Pacific Community website (https://sdd.spc.int/digital_library/disability-nauru (accessed on 5 July 2022)).

[37] Tonga, Tonga Statistics Department, *Tonga Disability Survey Report 2018* (Nuku'alofa, 2018).

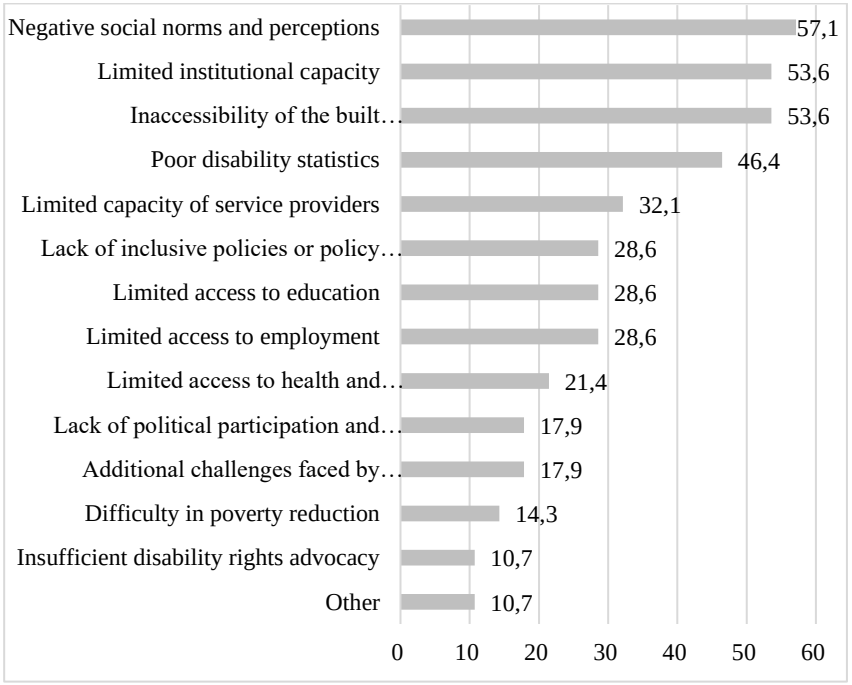
programmes, were delivered to persons with disabilities to mitigate the adverse impacts of the pandemic.

39. A good example of subregional work on cooperation towards disability inclusion is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) adoption of the ASEAN Enabling Master Plan 2025: Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which is focused on facilitating the implementation of the Convention within the ASEAN region. ESCAP contributed inputs, normative guidance and information on good practices to the preparation of the Master Plan and provided technical assistance for the development of the project entitled "Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the ASEAN Enabling Master Plan 2025: Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities". Building on the Pacific Regional Strategy on Disability 2010–2015 by the Pacific Islands Forum, the Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2016–2025 provides a guideline for Pacific governments to expedite disability-inclusive development and strengthen coordination and collaboration in support of national initiatives.

B. Key challenges

40. A total of 28 countries and territories reported challenges and barriers to disability-inclusive development (figure II). Negative social norms and perceptions about disability were identified as a key challenge by 57.1 per cent of the respondents. Despite the introduction of social and human rights models of understanding disability, some government officials, service providers and the general population still regard impairments or medical conditions as the main cause of disability. They neglect the attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder persons with disabilities from fully and effectively participating in society on an equal basis with others. The biomedical model of disability views persons with disabilities as incapable of living independently in the community and contributing to development efforts. Many governments highlighted the urgent need to raise awareness of disability rights and eliminate discrimination based on disability.

Figure II
Challenges in advancing disability-inclusive development reported by 28 countries and territories
(Percentage)



Abbreviation: ICT, information and communications technology.

41. Approximately 53.6 per cent of the countries and territories reported limited institutional capacity as a challenge to promoting disability-inclusive development. A few noted the lack of a multisectoral approach and coordination among government entities. Often, disability perspectives were not mainstreamed into the work of ministries or public organizations beyond the focal ministry on disability issues. Moreover, limited financial and human resources for the cause of disability inclusion restricted the effective implementation of disability policies and programmes. Many governments emphasized that advancing disability-inclusive development should take a whole-of-government approach and required more investment.

42. The inaccessible environment was a challenge noted by 53.6 per cent of the survey respondents. Access to the built environment, transportation, information and communications technology and other services is critical for persons with disabilities to participate fully in all aspects of life. However, many persons with disabilities, in particular those living in rural and hard-to-reach areas, experience accessibility-related challenges. Governments stressed the significance of enhancing laws, policies and technical standards to support the development of inclusive and universal design-based cities and communities for all.

43. The lack of quality disability statistics was reported by 46.4 per cent of the countries and territories as a challenge. The number of persons with disabilities was often underestimated in surveys and administrative databases due to difficulties in data collection and analysis. Information on barriers to participating in society faced by persons with disabilities was largely unavailable. In addition, some countries and territories raised concerns about the lack of interoperability of databases regarding persons with disabilities managed by different agencies. The absence of reliable and comprehensive disability data made it challenging to plan and provide the most-needed support

to persons with disabilities. It was widely accepted by governments that strengthening disability statistics lies at the centre of evidence-based policymaking and programming.

44. Other challenges and barriers identified by countries and territories included the lack of trained and sensitized personnel to provide services (32.1 per cent), development or implementation of inclusive policies and programmes (28.6 per cent), quality and inclusive education for persons with disabilities (28.6 per cent) and decent work and productive employment for persons with disabilities (28.6 per cent).

C. COVID-19 and disability inclusion

45. The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted persons with disabilities, exacerbated existing inequalities and hindered progress towards the full realization of an inclusive and sustainable society where no one is left behind. Addressing the negative impact of the pandemic on persons with disabilities has become a challenge for many governments in advancing disability-inclusive development.

46. A total of 28 respondents to the voluntary national survey described how the pandemic has affected progress towards disability-inclusive development. The pandemic has significantly impeded the right of persons with disabilities to education (50.0 per cent of survey respondents), employment (42.9 per cent), health and rehabilitation (42.9 per cent), information and communications (42.9 per cent) and access to support and services (39.3 per cent), among other areas. On the other hand, several countries also highlighted the opportunities brought about by the pandemic, such as the enhanced partnerships between governments and organizations of persons with disabilities, the increased awareness of policymakers and health workers about disability issues, the development of inclusive programmes to address the needs of persons with disabilities, strengthened participation of persons with disabilities in daily activities through accessible online platforms, the introduction of sign language interpretation services on television channels and other opportunities.

47. The 28 survey respondents also provided information on measures to support and empower persons with disabilities in the context of the pandemic. To mainstream disability inclusion into COVID-19 response and recovery, 92.9 per cent of the countries and territories organized awareness-raising activities on upholding the rights of persons with disabilities amid the pandemic, 89.3 per cent considered disability issues in COVID-19-related plans, strategies and guidelines, 82.1 per cent built partnerships with organizations of persons with disabilities in the delivery of services for persons with disabilities, 78.6 per cent consulted persons with disabilities in developing COVID-19 responses, and 64.3 per cent had grievance procedures in place for persons with disabilities regarding government responses to the pandemic.

48. Regarding continued access to goods and services, 89.3 per cent of the countries and territories ensured the continued provision and maintenance of assistive devices, 85.7 per cent provided COVID-19-related psychosocial support for persons with disabilities, 75.0 per cent continued the provision of health care and rehabilitation services through means such as telemedicine and telerehabilitation, 75.0 per cent organized home delivery of daily necessities and essential items for persons with disabilities, and 71.4 per cent supported service providers and personal assistants to guarantee the delivery of goods and services.

49. To promote the accessibility of public information, 78.6 per cent of the countries and territories disseminated COVID-19 information by means of accessible web pages, 71.4 per cent disseminated COVID-19 information in various accessible formats such as Braille and ePub and easy-read versions, 71.4 per cent provided sign language interpretation services at press conferences on COVID-19, 67.9 per cent enabled emergency call centres to receive and respond to standard text messages and calls from relay services, and 46.4 per cent provided real-time captioning services at press conferences on COVID-19.

50. Regarding medical and quarantine policies and processes, 85.7 per cent prioritized persons with disabilities in the vaccine roll-out, 71.4 per cent provided mental health services for persons with disabilities to support their emotional and mental well-being amid the pandemic, 67.9 per cent improved the physical accessibility of designated health facilities such as testing facilities and quarantine centres, 64.3 per cent enhanced information and communications accessibility in health facilities and 50.0 per cent allocated trained personnel to address the needs of persons with disabilities under quarantine.

51. With regards to social protection and employment support, 92.9 per cent provided in-kind support such as food for persons with disabilities during the pandemic, 85.7 per cent offered cash transfers, 67.9 per cent implemented administrative measures such as extending the validity period of disability certificates and allowing an online application for disability certificates, 64.3 per cent promoted the recruitment and employment of persons with disabilities through activities such as organizing awareness-raising campaigns and establishing online employment portals, 64.3 per cent implemented measures and incentives to support employers of persons with disabilities and 64.3 per cent assisted businesses of persons with disabilities with subsidies, grants and other means.

52. The 28 survey respondents also reported challenges and barriers to assisting persons with disabilities during the pandemic. Disruption of service provision due to movement restrictions and social distancing measures was noted by 60.7 per cent of the countries and territories. Health-care services and other essential support sometimes could not be delivered to persons with disabilities smoothly and safely. Some 50.0 per cent of the respondents highlighted limited technical and financial capacities to address the needs of persons with disabilities. In addition, disability perspectives might not be fully integrated into emergency care systems and COVID-19-related measures. Often, there were not enough human and financial resources to ensure inclusive COVID-19 response and recovery. Accessibility issues were raised by 39.3 per cent of the countries and territories. The inaccessibility of health facilities and public information restricted persons with disabilities from availing themselves of government support and services. Moreover, 17.9 per cent of the countries and territories mentioned the lack of data to support policymaking and service delivery.

III. Institutional setting and legal framework for disability-inclusive development

A. Government institutions, coordination mechanisms and grievance procedures

53. To guide their work on disability inclusion, all of the 29 countries and territories that provided data indicated that they had a national focal department for disability inclusion. The most commonly reported roles and responsibilities of the focal departments were creation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes; coordination with stakeholders; provision of services and monitoring service delivery; and organization of advocacy activities and training programmes.

54. At least 42 countries and territories had a national coordination mechanism on disability, based on responses to the voluntary national survey and the most recent reports by States parties to the Convention.[38] The formulation and implementation of disability policy; coordination of disability-related work; provision of technical assistance; and monitoring and evaluation of programmes were the most commonly described roles of the coordination mechanisms.

55. To ensure that persons with disabilities have a means to share their complaints regarding discrimination or report institutional failure to comply with relevant inclusion laws, at least 31 countries and territories reported in survey responses and reports by States parties to the Convention that they had grievance procedures or mechanisms for persons with disabilities. While some countries and territories reported having disability-specific mechanisms, others reported that the human rights or ombudsman offices were also responsible for grievances related to disability inclusion. Governments listed various reporting mechanisms, including submitting written complaints, contacting hotlines and websites, the option to submit complaints anonymously and for individuals or organizations to file complaints on behalf of themselves or others. Some governments reported that if the situation could not be resolved by means of the mechanism, the complaint could be submitted to arbitration or the courts, with legal aid provided to those with financial need. The independence of these grievance mechanisms was stressed by governments.

B. Sustainable Development Goal mechanism, plan and review

56. Disability inclusion is key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. However, many countries and territories have not fully integrated disability inclusion into their Goal mechanisms, plans or reviews. Of the 26 countries and territories that reported in the voluntary national survey that they had a national coordination mechanism for achieving the Goals, 18 indicated that disability inclusion was one of the aims of the mechanism. Several governments included a disability-related entity as a member of the mechanism. The representatives of persons with disabilities cited most were organizations of persons with disabilities or civil society organizations and the national disability focal point.

[38] The most recently available reports by States parties that are members and associate members of the Commission were reviewed. The number of mechanisms mentioned should not be considered an exhaustive list. The reports can be found at OHCHR, "UN Treaty Body Database". Available at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/SitePages/Home.aspx (accessed on 2 May 2022).

57. Twenty-two countries and territories reported in the survey that disability inclusion was reflected in their national strategy or action plan for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. In reporting on how involved persons with disabilities and their representative organizations were in the development cycle of these strategies and plans, more governments reported persons with disabilities were fully or largely involved in the planning and implementation phases than in the evaluation and monitoring phases. Governments indicated a lack of advocacy around disability inclusion at the time of the strategy and plan formation and a lack of coordination with the technical committees as reasons for not integrating disability inclusion into the plan.

58. In a review of the most recent voluntary national reviews completed by 44 members and associate members of the Commission, ESCAP found that 30 of the reviews provided at least one indicator with disability disaggregated data, most commonly with regards to employment or education. Most of the reviews noted persons with disabilities as one of the groups likely to be left behind. Only eight of the reviews mentioned that persons with disabilities were included in the preparation of the review, either as individuals or as groups representing persons with disabilities.

C. Disability law and anti-discrimination legislation

59. Most of the countries and territories that responded to the voluntary national survey indicated that they had an overarching national disability law. Governments reported persons with disabilities were most often fully or largely involved in the planning and design phase, followed by the implementation phase, and then the monitoring and evaluation phases of the law-making cycle. Governments reported persons with disabilities were included in the planning and design phase through their participation in consultations, drafting committees and dedicated task forces. In the implementation phase, persons with disabilities were reported to have co-authored an implementation plan and worked with the government in the delivery of services. Regarding the evaluation and monitoring phases, persons with disabilities were represented in the evaluation and monitoring bodies, assisted in choosing the topics of evaluation and provided feedback on audit reports.

60. To uphold the rights of persons with disabilities, many of the countries and territories responding to the voluntary national survey reported having anti-discrimination legislation. Several governments cited their laws on the rights of persons with disabilities as also providing for anti-discrimination. Other governments cited their constitutions or sector-specific anti-discrimination laws, such as education or employment, as covering the full population, including persons with disabilities. A few countries and territories reported specific laws on discrimination against persons with disabilities, including Hong Kong, China; Japan; and the Republic of Korea.

D. Disability policy, strategy and action plan

61. To accomplish disability-inclusive development, it is crucial to put into place policies and strategies that explicitly promote inclusion and address issues faced by persons with disabilities. Most of the countries and territories that responded to the voluntary national survey reported that they had a national disability policy, strategy and/or action plan. In the planning and design phase, countries and territories reported persons with disabilities were consulted through interviews, workshops and meetings or were included in

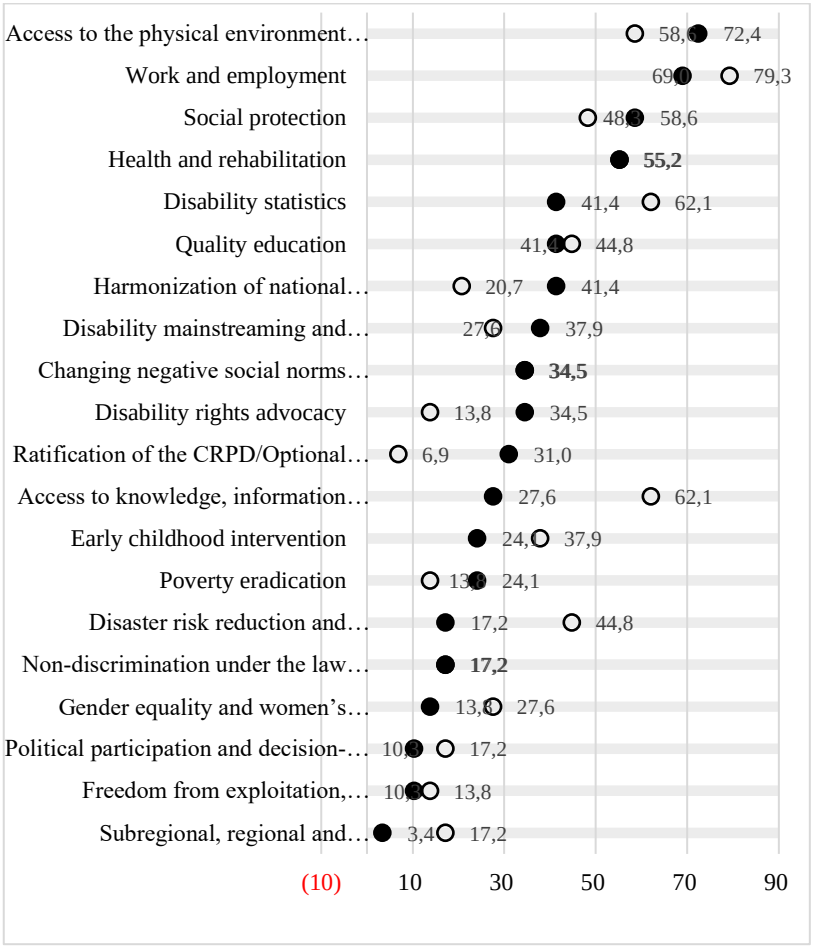
steering committees. They also provided inputs through public forums and, in one instance, co-authored the action plan. In the implementation phase, persons with disabilities were included in the committees responsible for overseeing implementation, participated in the dissemination of the action plans to local governments and organizations, and served as partners in implementation. Regarding evaluation and monitoring, persons with disabilities served on the monitoring and evaluation committees and participated in conducting evaluations. One Government reported questionnaires were distributed to organizations of persons with disabilities to solicit their feedback as part of the evaluation.

IV. Priorities for disability-inclusive development

A. Past, current and upcoming priorities

62. In response to the voluntary national survey, 29 countries and territories listed their top priorities for advancing disability-inclusive development from 2013 to 2022 (figure III). Access to the physical environment and transportation was identified by 72.4 per cent of the survey respondents as a critical area of concern, followed by work and employment (69.0 per cent), social protection (58.6 per cent), health and rehabilitation (55.2 per cent), disability statistics (41.4 per cent), quality education (41.4 per cent) and harmonization of national legislation with the Convention (41.4 per cent).

Figure III
Priorities for disability-inclusive development reported by 29 countries and territories
(Percentage)



Abbreviations: CRPD, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; Optional Protocol, Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

63. Regarding the priorities for the period 2023 to 2030, 79.3 per cent of the 29 countries and territories reported work and employment as priorities. Disability statistics and access to knowledge, information and communications were identified as priorities by 62.1 per cent of the survey respondents, followed by physical accessibility (58.6 per cent) and health and rehabilitation (55.2 per cent).

64. Noticeably, more governments are intensifying efforts in a few areas for the next phase of disability-inclusive development. Some 27.6 per cent of the countries and territories reported access to knowledge, information and communications technology as a past and current priority, while 62.1 per cent recognized such access as an upcoming priority. A significant increase was also observed in the prioritization of disaster risk reduction and management (from 17.2 per cent to 44.8 per cent) and disability statistics (from 41.4 per cent to 62.1 per cent).

B. Areas for action

65. The review of the implementation of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013–2022 reveals that although significant progress has been made in advancing disability-inclusive development across the region, much remains to be done to realize inclusive and sustainable societies for all. Governments need to further strengthen meaningful partnerships with organizations of persons with disabilities in all areas of disability work and promote a gender-responsive life-cycle approach towards disability inclusion. In line with the upcoming priorities identified by respondents to the voluntary national survey, members and associate members of the Commission may wish to take a whole-of-government and all-of-society approach and invest in the following areas:

(a) Strengthen decent work and productive employment of persons with disabilities by providing employment services and skills training and banking services, as well as forging close collaborations with the private sector;

(b) Promote inclusive data production by using tools and protocols that allow disability disaggregation, such as the Washington Group questions on functioning, and adopting accommodation strategies to ensure the participation of persons with disabilities in data collection, analysis and dissemination;

(c) Enhance accessibility of the physical environment, public transportation and knowledge, information and communications systems through universal design and provide reasonable accommodation and assistive technologies for persons with diverse disabilities;

(d) Improve the coverage, quality and affordability of health and rehabilitation services, including early identification and intervention, for persons with disabilities and enable informed decision-making in health care;

(e) Develop an inclusive social protection system that offers basic income security, covers disability-related costs and supports access to health care and other essential services throughout the life cycle, through a mixture of contributory and non-contributory schemes;

(f) Build an inclusive education system at all levels through the development of accessible learning environments and capacity-building of teachers and education personnel;

(g) Recognize and support the leading roles of persons with disabilities in disaster preparedness and accelerate disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction planning and climate action;

(h) Address negative social norms and perceptions about disability, including advocating for the social and human rights models of disability, fighting the ableism mindset and ending the charitable approach to supporting persons with disabilities.

V. Issues for consideration

66. In view of the achievements, challenges and priorities with regard to the implementation of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, members and associate members of the Commission may wish to deliberate on the following topics:

(a) Good practices, innovative approaches and lessons learned concerning the implementation of the Decade;

(b) Strategic directions, priority areas and collaborative efforts to accelerate the development of inclusive and sustainable societies;

(c) Means and ways to promote and accelerate whole-of-government and all-of-society approaches and investing in the areas of action identified under the previous section of the present document.