

Disability Inclusion Helpdesk, June 22

Evidence digest focus issue: LGBTIQ+ and Disability Inclusion

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Guest blog: promoting the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ people with disabilities

People with disabilities are not a homogenous group and are likely to face additional barriers or discrimination based on other aspects of their identity, including their age, race and their sexuality or gender identity. Despite this, there is a lack of evidence and resources on the lives and needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) people with disabilities.

To introduce this evidence digest, we interviewed Nu, a disability rights activist and founder of Revival Disability India. Revival Disability India is a digital media project on disability, sexuality and intersectional ableism for disabled and queer folks, by disabled and queer folks.



Nu, a disability rights activist speaking at an event.

What are the key issues affecting LGBTIQ+ people with disabilities?

There is a lack of LGBTIQ+ inclusion in the disability movement; it is often very cis-gender, white, and middle class or upper caste. The ladder of privilege means that certain individuals have more space and power within the movement, and society more widely, while others are invisible. Disabled people are already marginalised, women and particularly queer women do not have the same opportunities to lead and make decisions.

Talking about gender and sexuality is seen as a luxury for some working in the disability movement, compared to issues like access, which is important but not the only issue affecting disabled people. There are still a limited number of organisations working on disability in India, fewer still that follow a disability justice approach, and even fewer that work on disability and LGBTIQ+ inclusion. Many follow a charity model approach to disability inclusion, where disabled people are seen as being in need, and the focus is on accessibility, particularly on creating ramps and donating wheelchairs. These organisations don't focus on identity, community or addressing discrimination, and there is no visibility of queerness. There is also a lack of awareness: sexuality is seen as a choice, not a right.

It is difficult to navigate stigma and discrimination – both as a disabled person and for being LGBTIQ+. LGBTIQ+ disabled people do not see themselves represented in business, politics or in love stories. There is a lot of pressure to present yourself as traditionally desirable and physically fit. Members of our community also face lots of invasive, intimate and dehumanising questions, including 'how does your body function? How do you have sex?' Due to this stigma and a false perception that all disabled people are asexual, there is a lack of quality education on sexual health and relationships.

What can individuals and organisations do to promote inclusion of LGBTIQ+ people with disabilities? Are there good examples of inclusion in practice?

The world is often not designed for LGBTIQ+ disabled people. Traditional meeting spaces are often not accessible and there can be a lot of stigma and discrimination. Many LGBTIQ+ disabled folks come together in online spaces instead, such as Whatsapp groups, forums or collectives like Revival India, where they can form a community and be free of the mandates put on them around individuality, agency, sexuality and relationships. As a person with a chronic illness and a disability I have been able to create an online space of collective joy where LGBTIQ+ disabled people can connect with each other. It is important to create these communities where queer disabled people can come together to express themselves, their feelings, and their frustrations.

In some cases showing LGBTIQ+ disabled people basic kindness is seen as inclusion: there is a long way to go. There are a lot of tokenistic approaches to inclusion; organisations that talk about inclusion in ways that they can gain publicity or media coverage but do not put these messages into practice. Organisations need to consider their policies

and ways of working to make sure that no discrimination is allowed and that disabled employees are given enough time to rest.

Organisations also need to make sure they are taking an intersectional approach. Queer disabled people in rural areas often face more barriers and can have more internalised ableism and homophobia, with negative effects for their mental health. At Revival India, we are starting to translate our messages into Hindi to improve our reach into rural areas.

The latest evidence and guidance on disability and LGBTIQ+ inclusion

The intersections between LGBTIQ+ and disability inclusion

A paper exploring **intersectionality and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), particularly at the intersections of disability and LGBTI** was published in *Global Public Health* in February 2022. The paper highlighted how the Preamble to the CRPD had a strong emphasis on intersectionality and recognised the aggravated forms of discrimination persons with disabilities may face, however, it failed to include sexual orientation, gender identity or expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) in the provisions of the treaty. Whilst there has been a shift towards greater inclusion, the paper highlighted that CRPD discourse is dependent upon political will of states and positions of UN officials. The paper recommends greater facilitation and encouragement of participation by activists and civil society working on the intersections of SOGIESC and disability, to ensure they can shape human rights frameworks that fully embrace the rights of diverse persons with disability in relation to SOGIESC.

In May 2020, **“Out of the Margins: Intersectional analysis of disability and diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, expression and sex characteristics in humanitarian and development contexts”** was published by CBM Australia, Edge Effect and Nossal Institute. The paper highlighted that both people with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ people experience prejudice, discrimination, exclusion and violence in development and humanitarian contexts, and that those at the intersection of disability and SOGIESC face greater barriers and discrimination within social, political and legal systems. The analysis found that there is a lack of organisations or groups focusing on people with disabilities and diverse SOGIESC, and services to meet their needs are minimal, especially in rural areas. The study identified the various ways to overcome discrimination and marginalisation, including shifting attitudes within relevant institutions or service-providers; increasing awareness of, and intentional focus on, people with disabilities and diverse SOGIESC; and improving the broader political and legal context. The study concludes with recommendations for international organisations, advocacy and donor-level inclusion, including, building internal organisational mechanisms to be inclusive of people with disabilities and diverse SOGIESC.

The book **Young, Disabled and LGBT+: Voices, Identities and Intersections**, published in February 2020, brings together the work of an international team to explore the

intersections of sexuality, gender identity and disability in the lives of young people. The chapter **Between and betwixt: experiences of being young, trans and disabled in India** highlights findings from original research into the life experiences and needs of trans people with disabilities in India. They find that non-normative sexualities are rarely expressed, and where they are, the reasons are attributed to disability. Adolescents and young people with disabilities are largely hidden within LGBTIQ+ groups. The research also considers the role that social movements can play, particularly in relation to social acceptance and familial ties.

The World Institute on Disability have hosted a podcast called **What's Up WID: LGBTQIA+ and Disability Intersectionality**, with Shona Lousie, a writer, photographer and accessibility consultant, who is creating a safe space for LGBTQIA+ people with disabilities to build a community and fight for liberation. The podcast discusses what it means to be an LGBTQIA+ person with a disability and why it is important to build accessible spaces for LGBTQIA+ people with disabilities to build a community.

Access to care and support services

A systematic review of literature on the **social inclusion of LGBTQ and gender diverse adults with intellectual disability in disability services**, published in the Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disability in 2022, found that the marginalisation of LGBTIQ+ adults with intellectual disabilities face in western societies was mirrored within disability services and organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs). LGBTIQ+ adults with intellectual disabilities face paternalistic attitudes and may experience discrimination and exclusion from people who construe their expression of their sexuality or gender identity as a behavioural issue associated with intellectual disability. Disability support staff perceived themselves as unprepared to support with the sexuality-related needs of their clients due to a lack of training and guidance. The paper argues that research is needed into interventions to support LGBTIQ+ people, particularly transgender people and LGT women, with intellectual disabilities within disability-related services and OPDs.

The study **“I’m black, a woman, disabled and lesbian’: LGBT ageing and care services at the intersections in South Africa”** was published in the Sexualities journal in 2022. The study, the first of its kind in South Africa, explored the experiences of ageing and care among older LGBT people in two provinces in South Africa. The paper found that older LGBT people’s experiences of ageing and care is influenced by the patriarchal, postapartheid context, which resulted in barriers to care, particular for older black LGBTIQ+ people, especially lesbian, bisexual and transgender women who are disproportionately affected. The study found that these intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalisation create significant barriers to accessing care and support and to full participation within society. The paper recommends that national ageing and care policies specifically name older LGBT people as a key group that services be rolled out for.

A study into **gender, identity, disability and unmet healthcare needs in the United States** was published in The International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health in February 2022. Using cross-sectional survey data, the study explored the rates of unmet

healthcare needs for transgender people with disabilities and cisgender people with disabilities. The study found that the odds of transgender people with disabilities reporting an unmet healthcare need was higher than cisgender people with disabilities for all unmet needs, except for preventative services. The authors argue that this is reflective of the compounding effects of discrimination based on disability status and gender identity. The paper identifies a need for better understanding on gender identity among people with disabilities and representative population data, particularly around mental health and developmental disabilities.

The impacts of **barriers to possessing gender-concordant identity documents on transgender and nonbinary people's mental health in Aotearoa/New Zealand** are explored in a study published in the LGBT Health Journal in 2022. The study found that those who had experienced barriers to changing gender markers on their IDs (68.7% of participants) went on to experience significant psychological stress disorders and had greater suicidal intentions. The study argues that removing barriers to legal gender recognition may be an effective way to improve mental health.

CHANGE produced an **easy-read guide to being LGBTQ+** and what it means. The guide aims was to help LGBTQ+ people who are autistic, have an intellectual disability or mental health condition be involved in the health services they use.

Education

A 2021 study on **addressing LGBT+ issues in comprehensive sexuality education for learners with visual impairment** published in the Sex Education Journal found that there were no lesson plans for teachers of learners with visual impairments and the current sexuality education curriculum fails to engage with LGBTIQ+ issues. As such, the study found that heterosexuality and able-bodiedness is instilled into the curriculum, perpetuating homophobia, transphobia and ableism across schools and communities. This paper found current lesson plans need to be revisited to safeguard against compulsory heterosexuality and able-bodiedness, and that work is need to ensure that teachers accept LGBTIQ+ learners with visual impairments. The study also recommends that teachers should display values and characteristics such as sensitivity and non-judgementalism as well as a concern for human rights in their approach to teaching about sex and relationships.

A study on **integrating equality into language classrooms in Indonesia and Vietnam**, was published in the Asian Journal of English Language and Pedagogy in March 2022. This study stemmed from the recent social conflicts that have arisen around equality values, particularly equality for people with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ people, who face discriminative treatment and policies. The study explores the effectiveness of integrating equality awareness into debate activities, focusing on four target groups who often receive abusive treatment: minority religious groups, LGBT people, people with disabilities and women. The study found that the tolerance level of the participants increased, particularly towards people with disability. The study recommended more widespread use of the model to increase the tolerance levels.

The latest evidence and guidance on disability inclusion: Other topics

Accessibility

The World Bank published a [technical note on accessibility](#) in April 2022. The note highlights that along with participation and non-discrimination, accessibility is a prerequisite for fostering social inclusion. It recognises that without access to buildings, transportation, communication, and information, a person's participation and full inclusion cannot be ensured, and persons with disabilities will remain unable to fully benefit from the World Bank's development investments. The note is split into four sections (1) the narrative, which explains what is meant by accessibility and why it is important, (2) project cycle guidance, (3) thematic fact sheets, including WASH, transport, and infrastructure, and (4) technical references, which provides guidance on the main accessibility recommendations in the infrastructure domain.

Assistive Technology

The World Health Organisation and UNICEF published the [global report on assistive technology](#) in May 2022. The report presents a comprehensive dataset and analysis of current assistive technology access and makes recommendations for concrete actions that will improve access. Based on representative self-reported population surveys in 29 countries, the report estimates that there are more than 2.5 billion people who would benefit from one or more assistive products, which is likely to rise to more than 3.5 billion people by 2050. Despite this, the majority of people who would benefit from it do not have sufficient access. The report presents ten recommendations intended to guide countries and the stakeholders in their work to progressively improve access to assistive technology and towards universal coverage, including recommendation 1: improve access to assistive technology within all key development sectors.

The WHO, UNICEF, ATscale and GDI Hub co-hosted a side event to the 15th Conference of the State parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (COPS15) titled [Assistive Technology – what we know now](#) to share key findings from the Global Report on Assistive Technology.

Climate Change

Stein and Stein's (2022) study on "[Climate Change and the right to health of people with disabilities](#)" highlighted climate change directly and disproportionately threatens the right to health of people with disabilities. The global mortality rate of people with disabilities from climate-related disasters is four times higher than people without disabilities, due to scarcity of inclusive planning, accessible information, early warning systems, transportation and discriminatory attitudes. Additionally, climate change exacerbates existing inequalities with indirect disproportionate effects on people with disabilities due to barriers to and increased

exposure to social determinants of health such as poverty, and barriers to education, employment, or adequate housing. The paper highlighted that governments should include organisations of persons with disabilities as stakeholders to ensure disability-inclusive health planning, especially for post-disaster contexts.

The International Institute of Social Studies published a blog [““Nothing about us, without us!”: Disability inclusion in community-based climate resilient programs. A case study of Indonesia”](#) in February 2022. The blog shares findings from a research-practice project conducted with Plan Indonesia to inform how they address impacts of climate change on their inclusive sanitation programme. The study found that climate change poses huge challenges for the wellbeing of people with disabilities but also presents opportunities for organisations to include the knowledge and leadership of people with disabilities in programmes, contributing to shift perceptions of persons with disabilities from ‘aid beneficiaries’ to agents driving their own development.

A side event on [women with disability leading climate action](#) was held at the 15th session of the conference of the state parties to the CRPD (COSP15) hosted by Disability Rights Fund, the International Disability Alliance, Global Affairs Canada, GLAD Network and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland. The panel highlighted the important role women with disabilities are playing to ensure gender-responsive and disability inclusive responses for climate action.

The Global Disability Innovation Hub chaired a side event titled [Climate and crisis: disability-inclusive resilience in cities](#) at COSP15. The impacts of climate and crises are continuing to converge in cities with evidence showing persons with disabilities are among the most affected. The recording includes International Sign Language.

COSP15

The [Fifteenth session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (COSP15) was held in New York from 14-16th June 2022. During the session the election of nine members of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with disabilities was conducted.

The Conference had the overarching theme of ‘Building disability-inclusive and participatory societies in the COVID context and beyond’ and three sub themes:

1. [Innovation and technology advancing disability rights](#)
2. [Economic empowerment and entrepreneurship of persons with disabilities](#)
3. [Participation of persons with disabilities in climate action, disaster risk reduction and resilience against natural disasters](#)

A note for each sub-theme (hyperlinked above) was prepared by the Secretariat to provide background information on the topics with a view to facilitating round-table discussions. The notes cover international normative frameworks, provide an overview of the current situation, gaps and challenges, and present ways forward and key questions for consideration. The notes are available in UN languages and in Easy Read.

Event recordings, key documents and the programme can be found on the UN DESA website [here](#).

Cross-cutting

The **Embodied Inequality in Disability and Development** book published in April 2022 highlights how the embodied knowledge of persons with disabilities is a vital resource for understanding equality within development. The book finds that disability inclusion has never been as important as it is today in the development discourse, yet systematic discrimination against people due to their disabilities persists. The book is divided into three sections (1) embodies inequalities as new perspectives, including chapters on climate change adaptation and menstrual health, (2) embodied inequalities in policy, including a chapter on laws for reducing economic inequalities, and (3) embodied inequalities in development practice, including chapters on improving livelihoods.

Safeguarding

The Resource and Support Hub published two Pocket Guides on safeguarding persons with disabilities and/or mental health conditions in **civil society organisation (CSO) programmes** and **in the workplace**. The guides outline risks of harm, including sexual exploitation and abuse, that persons with disabilities may face in programmes or in the workplace, and provide practical guidance on how to manage these risks and make your safeguarding measures disability inclusive. The guides highlight that disability-inclusive safeguarding practices can help better safeguard everyone; it is in the interest of all organisations to consider this guide in their safeguarding work.

Ukraine Invasion

In April 2022, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner published a briefing note on the **human rights situation of persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities in Ukraine**. The note focuses on two major concerns affecting the rights of persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities – institutionalisation and denial of legal capacity – and analyses the impact of these and other concerns on a range of human rights, including the right to live independently and be included in the community, freedom from torture, violence and abuse, and education. The note concludes by saying that persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities are the most neglected group among persons with disabilities in Ukraine, due to their systematic institutionalisation, stigmatisation and lack of guarantees of protection.

Disability Rights International (DRI) published a report on the **dangers facing children with disabilities in Ukraine's orphanages** in May 2022 sharing findings from an April 2022 visit. Whilst many children from institutions have been evacuated, DRI found that children with greater support needs were left behind whilst children without disabilities and children with disabilities who have lower support needs were evacuated. Resources and staffing for medical care and support were stretched thin before the invasion and is now at crisis point. A

webinar was held by DRI and the European Network on Independent Living on 5th May to launch the report. A recording can be found [here](#).

Disability inclusion policy news

The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities in the Government of India have released a [Public Notice Inviting Comments on the draft National Policy for Persons with Disabilities](#). The deadline for these comments is 9th July 2022.

The FCDO's [Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy](#) was released in February 2022, and aims to uphold the UK's ambitious approach for their work with and for persons with disabilities. It sets out how they will maintain and build on significant progress that has been made since the Global Disability Summit and Disability Inclusion Strategy in 2018. The strategic vision is for persons with disabilities to be meaningfully engaged and empowered and can enjoy their full rights and freedoms on an equal basis with others, without discrimination and across the life-course.

About the Disability Inclusion Helpdesk:

The Disability Inclusion Helpdesk provides research and technical assistance on disability inclusion to the UK Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office as part of the Disability Inclusive Development Programme. All our published reports are available on [our website](#). Contact us via: enquiries@disabilityinclusion.org.uk