

Disability Inclusion Helpdesk, October 2024

Evidence digest focus issue: Health and Disability Inclusion - Antimicrobial Resistance and Artificial intelligence

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Guest blog: Andrea Pregel on disability inclusion in health systems

To introduce this evidence digest, Susi Taylor, Associate Consultant with Social Development Direct, spoke to Andrea Pregel, Global Technical Lead for Inclusive Health at Sightsavers, about some of the topics at the World Health Summit in October 2024, namely disability inclusion and antimicrobial resistance and how to ensure Artificial Intelligence is inclusive of people with disabilities.

What do you see as some of the key challenges to disability inclusion as part of health services?

Evidence suggests that people with disabilities require more general and specialist healthcare services yet often face worse health outcomes due to a range of health inequities. These include:

1. Structural factors, such as economic crises, political changes, and climate change, which disproportionately impact them.
2. Social determinants of health, such as where they are born and live. For example, there is often a cyclical relationship between poverty and disability.
3. Increased exposure to risk factors associated with non-communicable diseases, such as alcohol and tobacco consumption, unhealthy diet and physical inactivity.
4. Inadequate health systems, for example a lack of staff training, can all create barriers for people with disabilities to access healthcare. Stigma and discrimination further exacerbate these challenges.

As a result, according to the [WHO Global report on health equity for people with disabilities](#), individuals with disabilities experience higher risks of developing conditions such as diabetes, stroke or depression, as well as reduced life expectancy compared to people without disabilities. While variations exist across regions, these issues contribute to ongoing health inequities and worse health outcomes.

Why do you think people with disabilities are at greater risk of antimicrobial resistance and what can be done to mitigate these risks?

People with disabilities are more likely to experience chronic health conditions, many have weakened immune systems, and require frequent healthcare access, which increases their risk of infection and antibiotic use, potentially leading to antimicrobial resistance (AMR). However, reliable data on AMR among this population is lacking.

The WHO's [People-centred approach to addressing antimicrobial resistance in human health](#) emphasises infection prevention and universal access to healthcare services, but significant barriers remain for people with disabilities in accessing health promotion and preventive care. Additionally, health sector plans often fail to integrate disability inclusion and health equity, and most countries do not systematically collect data on disability, hindering the monitoring of AMR trends in this group.

What do you think are the opportunities and risks of using artificial intelligence to ensure better inclusion of people with disabilities?

In his 2021 [report on the rights of persons with disabilities and AI](#), the UN's Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities highlighted that these technologies have, of course, an enormous potential positive impact on the lives of people with disabilities in various sectors, such as health and education. However, he flagged that there are concerns about inherent biases in AI, including unethical data use and discrimination against individuals with disabilities. While AI can enhance accessibility through tools like speech-to-text applications, it can also replicate social biases. For example, there have been reports of automated screening processes for video applications for job interviews in which candidates with disabilities are assigned lower scores because they did not conform to ableist "normalised" standards of what the algorithm considered to be ideal physical traits, tone of voice and mannerism.

Using the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as a framework reveals significant challenges and risks associated with AI, including issues related to equality, privacy, and access to education and healthcare. Some of the most serious concerns are not just about the inherent AI ethical biases – but also about how AI tools could be actively used to profile people with disabilities. This may include, for example, governments using AI to assess personal characteristics of people with disabilities extracted from their social networks to inform decision-making around insurance premiums or social security benefits. As the AI sector rapidly expands, there are calls for policies that address these ethical and human rights issues, but meaningful engagement from people with disabilities is crucial to ensure their needs and perspectives are included.

What policies and practices over the last year have excited you? What role do you think donors like the FCDO should play in promoting more disability inclusive health services?

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed significant gaps in health systems for people with disabilities, often leaving them without access to life-saving treatments. The 2022 [World Health Assembly resolution on the highest attainable standard of health for persons with disabilities](#) was a game-changer and led to the World Health Organisation launching their first ever [Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities](#). The Global report outlines ten key pillars and forty strategic actions for creating disability-inclusive health systems. A Guide for Action to inform the implementation of the report is now in development, set to launch soon. This is exciting, because for the first time we will have a blueprint and a process that Member States can follow to integrate disability inclusion into their ongoing health system strengthening efforts. It will be the apex of disability inclusive health system strengthening that we've seen so far.

Sightsavers is collaborating with the WHO and health ministries in countries like Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and Kenya to implement this guide, marking a systematic effort to embed disability inclusion in health policies. While some donor engagement exists, broader

resource commitments are needed to ensure effective implementation. In my view, this is where FCDO and other donors could really make a difference. By supporting the roll out of the Guide for Action and the implementation of the Global report, they would play a significant role in incorporating disability inclusion in the very fabric of health systems – which in turn would further contribute to advancing health equity and disability inclusion across all their priority areas, such as maternal health, sexual and reproductive health, nutrition and so on. As the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals deadline approaches, it is crucial to include people with disabilities in health systems to achieve Universal Health Coverage and other development targets. Although challenges remain, the WHO Guide for Action has the potential to transform health systems and promote equity for people with disabilities.

The latest evidence and guidance on disability inclusion and health

Antimicrobial resistance and disability inclusion

In 2024, the Lancet published “**Antimicrobial resistance and people living with disabilities.**” The article states that the intersection of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and disability is critical yet underexplored. **AMR claims over 700,000 lives annually and disproportionately affects individuals with disabilities, who represent about 16% of the global population.** Frequent healthcare visits increase their exposure to antibiotic-resistant bacteria, compounded by biological vulnerabilities and chronic conditions. Socioeconomic factors like poverty further hinder access to timely treatment, exacerbating AMR risks. An inclusive AMR strategy should incorporate disability considerations, enhance healthcare access through training, and provide tailored health literacy materials. Collaboration among governments, healthcare providers, and disability advocates is essential to protect the rights and health of individuals with disabilities.

In 2024, PLOS One published “**Health facilities readiness for standard precautions to infection prevention and control in Nepal: A secondary analysis of Nepal Health Facility Survey.**” This study evaluated the readiness of health facilities in Nepal to implement infection prevention and control standards using data from the Nepal Health Facility Survey 2021. The study demonstrated that Health Facilities engaged in quality assurance activities, client feedback reviews, and regular meetings showed significantly higher readiness scores. The study recommended focusing on quality assurance and effective management practices to enhance infection prevention and control efforts in facilities with low readiness.

Articles and research on how Artificial Intelligence and technology can be disability inclusive

In 2024, the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health published “**Leveraging Emerging Technologies to Expand Accessibility and Improve Precision in Rehabilitation and Exercise for People with Disabilities.**” Physical rehabilitation and

exercise training are vital for enhancing health and quality of life for individuals with disabilities. However, they often face significant barriers—physical, psychosocial, environmental, and economic—that limit their participation in these activities, leading to health inequities compared to those without disabilities. There is a pressing need for research and innovation to improve accessibility and encourage participation in rehabilitation and exercise programs. Emerging technologies such as telecommunications, wearables, virtual and augmented reality, artificial intelligence, and cloud computing offer promising solutions to enhance accessibility. This article underscores the potential of digital health technologies and scientific advancements to drive precision care strategies for individuals with disabilities.

The Health and Disability Journal published “**Understanding COVID-19 infection among people with intellectual and developmental disabilities using machine learning.**” Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities were disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, prompting this US-focused study to address two key questions: 1) the effectiveness of a machine learning model in predicting COVID-19 diagnoses for this population and 2) identifying primary predictors of infection among Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) users in one state. The study analysed over 700 variables using a random forest machine learning algorithm. The results of the study were that 1) the model achieved a 62.5% accuracy in predicting COVID-19 diagnoses, and 2) the key predictors of having COVID 19 amongst individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities included higher age, greater support needs, residence in lower-income neighbourhoods, total Medicaid expenditure, and higher body mass index. Whilst this study was US-focused, it highlights how AI can support people with intellectual development disabilities, who may be less capable of relaying the symptoms, in identifying the COVID-19 diagnosis.

In 2023, Frontiers in Digital Health published the “**Editorial: Artificial intelligence for human function and disability.**” Disability affects over one in six people globally, yet the potential of health data and artificial intelligence (AI) in this context remains largely unexplored. This Research Topic aimed to integrate interdisciplinary perspectives on digital health, data science, and rehabilitation science to harness AI for better understanding of human function and disability. Key studies presented in the paper provide valuable insights into the range of health information relevant to human function and disability, and into the role of AI technologies in helping to better collect, analyse, and report function and disability information. They demonstrate the opportunities and challenges in realising the potential of AI technologies to help analyse and use information on function and disability, reflecting on essential applications of AI in tasks such as information extraction, classification, and prediction. They further illustrate ways in which AI methods, particularly in natural language processing, can help in working with information that is traditionally difficult to collect and standardize, as well as raising awareness of key risks and data quality issues that may limit the benefits of AI use.

In 2024, Open Access Government published “**How AI can make public sector services more inclusive and accessible.**” The article notes that AI aims to transform the public sector by making it more inclusive and accessible, addressing significant challenges faced by people with disabilities. The World Health Organisation reports that 1.4 billion people globally have long-term disabilities. The article highlights several examples of AI tools, which can enhance

user experiences. The “Be My AI” extension provides immediate assistance for visually impaired users through image recognition. AI can also scan public sector websites for accessibility errors and simplifies complex information for those with cognitive difficulties. Additionally, AI technologies can improve services for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and support those with speech impairments through advanced speech recognition. Beyond specific applications, AI helps improve public sector workplaces and recruitment processes, promoting diversity and inclusion. The article concludes with a note of caution that ethical considerations are essential, including user involvement and the need for transparency to ensure AI solutions are genuinely inclusive.

In 2024, the Medical Futurist published an article focusing on the “**Best Examples Of Digital Health For Patients With Intellectual Disability.**” Digital health technologies, AI-powered tools and wearable devices, enhance the quality of life for individuals with intellectual disabilities by improving communication, bridging missing skills, and increasing safety. Supportive technologies, like remote monitoring systems and various sensors can provide peace of mind to caregivers and create a safer, more manageable environment. The article provides examples of diverse applications and areas where digital health solutions can help people with intellectual disabilities.

Disability inclusion and disease outbreaks

The International Disability Alliance published the “**Summary of the UN Disability and Development Report 2024.**” The report indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic intensified challenges for persons with disabilities. The response often excluded them through discriminatory practices and lack of accessible information. Alarming, half of COVID-19 deaths occurred among this population, highlighting their increased vulnerability. Many faced job losses and income reductions, with one-third losing access to vital personal assistance and accessibility services. Students with disabilities struggled with remote learning, with one in five dropping out and 90% lacking the necessary technology. Government support was inadequate; while over 90% of countries prioritised them in vaccination campaigns, only half provided financial aid for personal assistance and technology for remote learning, and less than half included them in social protection measures.

The BMC Public Health published “**COVID-19 vaccine uptake in individuals with functional difficulty, disability, and comorbid conditions: insights from a national survey in Bangladesh.**” This study evaluated COVID-19 vaccine uptake among individuals with disabilities in Bangladesh, using data from 9,370 respondents. It found that 57.37% of those with functional difficulties received at least one vaccine dose, while only 48.63% of those with both functional difficulties and disabilities did. Individuals with both functional difficulty and disability had a higher chance of not being vaccinated, as did those with comorbidities. The study highlights the low vaccine uptake among this population and calls for targeted strategies in future vaccine programs to improve access for individuals with disabilities.

Global Health Action published “**Sectoral challenges and negative feelings experienced by Palestinians with disability in besieged Gaza during COVID-19 pandemic.**” This article

looked in detail at numerous difficulties that disabled Palestinians experienced during COVID-19 pandemic in Gaza, Palestine. The research reported multiple difficulties and experiences related to education, health and socio-economic sectors in a context of conflict. This research found absence of accessible and inclusive emergency policies and practices in these three sectors during COVID-19 pandemic. Giving less importance to the needs of individuals with disabilities (deprioritising them) led to adverse emotional reactions including dissatisfaction, fear, anger, stress, anxiety, and depression. The research calls for the safeguarding of the right of people with disabilities to accessible education, health care and socio-economic support, in contexts of conflict, crises and emergencies.

Inclusive health for children with disabilities

In 2023, The International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health has published **“A Portrait of the Rights of Children with Disabilities in Nigeria: A Policy Review”**. The report examined the integration of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) into Nigeria’s disability and childhood policies. Despite Nigeria’s ratification of these conventions, the study revealed a limited understanding of their impact on ensuring access to care for children, particularly those with disabilities. Using a comprehensive policy review and thematic analysis, six key themes were identified: participation, support systems, awareness raising, adherence factors, laws and rights, and services. The findings indicated that while some federal and state policies align with the CRC and CRPD, there was a notable absence of specific disability policies addressing the needs of children and their families. The study concluded that to effectively uphold the rights of all children in Nigeria, there must be a greater commitment to implementing the recommendations of these UN conventions.

The same journal published **The Journey to Early Identification and Intervention for Children with Disabilities in Fiji** in 2023. The research investigated the experiences of families in Fiji with children who have developmental disabilities, focusing on their access to intervention and support services. Despite the known benefits of early identification and intervention, many low- and middle-income countries, including Fiji, lack coordinated care systems. Through interviews with 12 caregivers and 17 stakeholders from various sectors, the qualitative study identified key stages in families’ journeys and the barriers and enablers they encountered. Enablers included proactive help-seeking behaviours and supportive policies, while barriers comprised insufficient awareness of developmental disabilities, service shortages, financial constraints, and lack of collaboration among sectors. The findings emphasised the need for a multi-sectoral approach to address these challenges and improve inclusion and participation for children with disabilities.

The International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health also published **“Creating Family-Centred Support for Children with Developmental Disabilities in Africa: Examples of Local Community Interventions”** in 2024. This paper highlighted the neglect of preschoolers with disabilities and their family caregivers in public health initiatives in low-income countries, despite the potential benefits of early intervention. It details a community-based approach implemented with minimal funding in Harare and rural Manicaland

Province, Zimbabwe. The discussion included the sustainability of these initiatives and their potential for replication in other communities. The main conclusion emphasised that disadvantaged communities can effectively mobilise to meet the needs of their most marginalised members.

In 2024, PLOS ONE published **“Health-related quality of life and associated factors among primary caregivers of children with cerebral palsy, in Bahir Dar and Gondar cities, Ethiopia”**. This study investigated the Health-Related Quality of Life (HRQOL) of primary caregivers of children with cerebral palsy (CP) in Gondar and Bahir Dar, Ethiopia. A community-based cross-sectional study was conducted from April to June 2022, involving convenience sampling of caregivers, with data collected by trained health workers and analysed using a generalised linear model. The findings revealed low HRQOL scores. Age, monthly income, educational status, sleeping status, relationship and house composition, number of living children, birth order of child, helpers, and type of CP were all significantly associated with HRQOL of primary caregivers of children with CP.

In 2024, the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health published **“Creating Family-Centred Support for Preschoolers with Developmental Disabilities in Low-Income Countries: A Rapid Review to Guide Practitioners”**. This rapid review highlighted the neglect of preschoolers with disabilities and their caregivers in health and social services in low-income and under-resourced areas. It identified low-cost, evidence-based strategies for community implementation, focusing on five key features: leadership for service creation, family-centred home support, opportunities for peer support and advocacy, mobilisation of community resources, and preschool educational opportunities for inclusion in primary schools. The review also demonstrated how public health researchers could enhance the dissemination of evidence-based practices to community practitioners, emphasising the potential for impactful, community-led interventions this vulnerable population needs.

Inclusive sexual and reproductive health for women and young people with disabilities

In 2024, the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health published **“Exploring Barriers to Accessing Sexual and Reproductive Health Services among Adolescents and Young People with Physical Disabilities in South Africa”**. The paper noted that despite South Africa's progressive sexual and reproductive health (SRH) policy framework, adolescents and young people with disabilities (AYPWDs) face significant barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive healthcare. This study explored these barriers among AYPWDs in Mpumalanga through focus group discussions with twenty-seven participants, employing thematic analysis guided by a socio-ecological model. Findings revealed individual-level barriers, such as poor socioeconomic status and lack of information, as well as interpersonal challenges, including difficulties in discussing SRH with parents and negative peer attitudes. Community-level obstacles included negative perceptions from non-disabled individuals and inadequate infrastructure, while organisational barriers were linked to healthcare workers' maltreatment and communication issues. The study called for intensified

public health strategies to enhance access to SRH services for AYPWDs, training for healthcare workers and educating communities about SRH.

In 2023, the same journal published another paper about South Africa entitled “**Experiences of Women with Disabilities in Accessing Maternal Healthcare Services: A South African Case Study**”. Access to maternal healthcare services is a significant challenge in many low- and middle-income countries, including South Africa. This study explored the experiences of women with disabilities in KwaZulu-Natal accessing public maternal healthcare during pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum care. Twelve women with various disabilities were interviewed, and data were analysed using the Framework of Assessing Access to Maternal Healthcare Services. Key barriers included: i) narrow passages and inaccessible formats for women with visual impairments; ii) communication difficulties and negative attitudes toward women with hearing impairments; and iii) inaccessible facilities for those with physical impairments. The findings underscore the urgent need for improved accessibility in maternal healthcare services.

In 2024, the Disability and Health Journal published “**Pattern of contraceptive use among reproductive-aged women with disabilities in Bangladesh: Evidence from multiple indicator cluster survey.**” This study aimed to examine contraceptive usage patterns among reproductive-aged women with disabilities in Bangladesh, analysing data from 47,465 women in the 2019 Bangladesh Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey. The findings revealed a 66.4% prevalence of contraceptive use, which dropped to 54% among women with severe disabilities. Women with moderate and severe disabilities had significantly lower odds of using modern contraception, at 31% and 47% lower, respectively, compared to women without disabilities. The study underscores the need for targeted family planning initiatives to address the lower contraceptive uptake among women with disabilities, reducing their vulnerability to unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortions.

In 2024, the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health published “**Addressing the Rehabilitation Needs of Women Experiencing Infertility in Ethiopia: Time for Action**”. Infertility poses significant psychological, social, and financial disabilities for women, especially in low- and middle-income countries like Ethiopia. This study aimed to explore the availability of rehabilitation-related services for women experiencing infertility. Researchers conducted interviews with fourteen service providers from various institutions across three locations. The analysis revealed five main themes: policies related to infertility, the misconception that disabilities must be visible, the need for rehabilitation services, the importance of wellness services, and the influence of religion on rehabilitation. The study concludes that policies addressing infertility should be strengthened, rehabilitation services should be integrated into fertility care, and infertility should be recognised as a disabling condition for women in Ethiopia.

In 2023, the British Medical Association published “**Sexual and reproductive healthcare must be disability inclusive,**” which focuses on Nigeria. The article notes that with women’s rights facing global setbacks, the need for disability-inclusive sexual health and family planning services is increasingly urgent. In May, G7 leaders condemned the coordinated rollback of

gender rights, emphasising the importance of public health policies that protect women's rights to sexual and reproductive health, particularly for women with disabilities who are often overlooked. In Nigeria, where contraception use is low and maternal mortality rates are high, women with disabilities encounter multiple forms of discrimination, leading to denial of reproductive rights and increased vulnerability to sexual abuse. Barriers such as stigma, lack of education, and negative attitudes among healthcare workers hinder access to appropriate healthcare and information. The article concludes that empowering women with disabilities through information and involvement in policy design is crucial for creating inclusive sexual and reproductive health services.

Inclusive health for older people with disabilities

The International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health published “**Healthy Ageing in Colombia 2018 and Its Variation in Relation to Social Conditions**”. The ageing population in Colombia raises concerns about the quality of life among older adults. This research quantified healthy ageing in 2018 using the Disability-Free Life Expectancy (DFLE) indicator and analysed its association with various social indicators. Findings revealed a healthy life expectancy of 71.5 years for women and 66.9 years for men, with associated disability expectancies of 8.3 and 6.4 years, respectively. Negative correlations were found with age and health problems, disability, lack of medical care, illiteracy, school absenteeism, and poverty, while higher education and retirement were positively associated. The study concluded that addressing health disparities through improved education, economic security, and healthcare access is crucial, particularly for women and in rural areas, to support healthier ageing in the country.

In 2024, the same journal published “**Rehabilitation Services for Young-Onset Dementia: Examples from High- and Low–Middle-Income Countries**”. It notes that the WHO Dementia Global Action Plan emphasises the need for rehabilitation services to promote health, reduce disability, and maintain quality of life for individuals living with dementia. However, such services are currently limited, particularly for those with young-onset dementia (YOD). This article presents a three-part overview aimed at developing rehabilitation services for YOD. It synthesises evidence-based rehabilitative therapies for conditions such as early-onset Alzheimer's disease, behavioural variant frontotemporal dementia, primary progressive aphasia, and posterior cortical atrophy. The article also discusses service characteristics and examples from three continents, highlighting the role of multidisciplinary teams, and concludes with the potential of telehealth to enhance accessibility to rehabilitation for individuals with YOD. The goal is to encourage clinical leads to integrate rehabilitation into their services by utilising existing resources and the expertise of the dementia professional community.

In 2024, BMC Public Health published “**Functional disability and its associated factors among community-dweller older adults living in Gondar Town, Ethiopia: a community-based cross-sectional study**”. Functional disability is a significant public health concern affecting the health and quality of life of older adults, including in Ethiopia where research is limited. This study assessed the prevalence and factors associated with functional disability in daily living activities among older adults in Gondar. The community-based cross-sectional

study involved 607 participants aged 60 and older, using questionnaires for assessment. The prevalence of functional disability in basic activities of daily living (bathing, dressing, toileting, transferring, continence, and feeding) and instrumental activities of daily living (telephone, shopping, preparing food, housekeeping, doing laundry, using transportation, handling medications, and handling finances) among older adults was 34.5% and 54.4%, respectively. Key associated factors included being 80 years or older, low-income status, multimorbidity, depression, and low physical activity levels. The study concluded that health interventions focused on increasing physical activity, managing multimorbidity and depression, and providing financial support could effectively reduce functional disability in older adults.

Disability inclusion and health in humanitarian contexts

In 2024, Humanity and Inclusion published **“Rehabilitation Matters - the appeal made by people in conflict-affected areas”**. In this advocacy report, seven individuals shared their experiences accessing rehabilitation and assistive technology in conflict-affected areas of Colombia, Iraq, and Lao PDR. This diverse group includes victims of explosive weapons, internally displaced persons, people with disabilities, and caregivers, all highlighting the urgent need for quality rehabilitation services and assistive technology as a matter of rights and dignity. The overall message - directed at public authorities, international organisations, and humanitarian actors - emphasised the necessity of inclusion and the fundamental rights of those affected with a collective call for enhanced efforts to meet their needs.

In 2024, Relief Web published **“QRCS supports rehabilitation, prosthetic implants centre in northern Syria”**. It detailed that in response to the humanitarian crisis in northwestern Syria, the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) supported the Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Implants Centre in Idlib to provide essential services for persons with disabilities facing limited access to medical care. The project aimed to enhance the physical and mental health of individuals with disabilities and injuries through prosthetics, splints, orthoses, physiotherapy sessions and psychosocial support sessions. The project served 2,200 direct beneficiaries and over 11,000 indirect beneficiaries, promoting independence and better mental health. The initiative highlighted the critical need for rehabilitation services amid a severe healthcare shortage in the region.

Disability inclusion and HIV

In 2023, BMC Public Health published **“Differences between persons with and without disability in HIV prevalence, testing, treatment, and care cascade in Tanzania: a cross-sectional study using population-based data.”** This study examined differences in HIV prevalence and care access between individuals with and without disabilities in Tanzania, using data from the Tanzania HIV Impact Survey. Among 31,579 respondents, the overall HIV prevalence was 4.9%, with higher rates in those with disabilities (5.7%) compared to those without (4.3%). Notably, individuals with disabilities were more likely to be aware of their HIV-positive status and access antiretroviral therapy (ART), though no significant differences in overall ART access were found after adjustment. However, men with disabilities had lower odds of achieving viral suppression. The findings suggest the need for disability-inclusive HIV

programming and emphasise incorporating disability status in global HIV surveys to better understand disparities.

Health Systems and Disability Inclusion

In 2024, The Lancet published “**Building disability-inclusive health systems**”. This review provides an overview of the existing evidence on health inequities faced by people with disabilities and describes existing approaches to making health systems disability inclusive. The review documents a broad range of health-care inequities for people with disabilities, which probably contribute towards health differentials. The paper identified ninety good practice examples that illustrate current strategies to reduce inequalities.

In 2024, The BMC Public Health journal published “**Links across disabilities: unveiling associations between functional domains**.” This study aimed to estimate correlations between functional difficulties across various domains (seeing, hearing, walking, cognition, self-care and communication) in six countries: Mauritius, Morocco, Senegal, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Uruguay. Researchers found significant positive correlations between functional difficulties across domains for all countries and both age groups ('18–44' and '45+'). Cognition, mobility, and hearing showed the strongest correlations, particularly between hearing and cognition, and mobility and cognition. Uruguay, as the only high-income country, exhibited the lowest correlations. These findings suggest that such correlations may indicate barriers to accessing social and healthcare services, highlighting the need for further research into the structural challenges faced by individuals with functional difficulties, particularly in healthcare contexts.

In 2024, Global Health Action published “**Access to primary healthcare services for adults with disabilities in Latin America and the Caribbean: a review and meta-synthesis of qualitative studies**.” This review and meta-synthesis of 34 qualitative studies aimed to analyse healthcare access for people with disabilities in Latin America and the Caribbean, identifying existing barriers. The analysis revealed barriers on both the demand and supply sides, organised into three themes: “ability to perceive,” “availability, accommodation and ability to reach,” and “appropriateness and ability to engage.” Key issues included compromised access to information, inadequate urban infrastructure, insufficient transportation, and negative attitudes from healthcare providers. The findings highlighted a need for improved training for healthcare providers and enhanced accessibility in healthcare facilities to ensure that the rights of people with disabilities are met.

In 2024, the Disability and Health Journal published “**Exploring healthcare barriers and satisfaction levels among deaf individuals in Ecuador: A video-based survey approach**.” This study explored barriers to healthcare access for the Deaf population in Ecuador, focusing on communication issues affecting satisfaction. Data from 386 participants showed that 95.9% had an officially recognised disability, with 53.9% experiencing hereditary deafness. Ecuadorian sign language was the primary method of communication (60.9%), but 65.0% struggled with medical instructions, and 66.6% noted inadequate resources for Deaf individuals. Satisfaction increased with the presence of interpreters, as 46.6% preferred them

over other methods. Despite being perceived as better, private facilities were accessed less frequently (38.9%). The findings highlight the urgent need for tailored healthcare services that include interpreters and improve resources for the Deaf.

In 2023, PLOS ONE published “**Barriers to the uptake of eye health services of the children in rural Bangladesh: A community-based cross-sectional survey.**” The paper noted that ocular morbidity among children is a significant public health issue globally. This study investigated the health-seeking behaviours of parents in Bangladesh with children suffering from ocular problems. Out of 198 cases of childhood ocular issues, only 43.9% of parents sought healthcare. Wealthier families showed better health-seeking behaviour, with 55.3% of affluent families seeking care compared to 36% of low-income families. Barriers included lack of knowledge, awareness, and financial constraints. Socio-demographic factors significantly influenced parents' decisions to seek appropriate eye care.

In 2024, the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health published “**Territorial Disparities in Dental Care for Disabled Persons and Oral Health-Related Indicators: A Population-Level Approach in Brazil’s Public Healthcare System from 2014 to 2023.**” This study assessed disparities in dental care for disabled individuals, in different Brazilian territories, within Brazil's public healthcare system from 2014 to 2023. It compared the incidence of outpatient dental procedures performed by special care specialists and hospitalisations across regions against national estimates. The findings revealed that the northern region had the highest outpatient productivity, while the southern region showed lower productivity. In contrast, inpatient productivity was lower in the northeastern and central-western regions. Outpatient productivity was positively correlated with indicators such as poor self-rated general and oral health, a lack of dental visits, and visits specifically for tooth extractions. Overall, significant disparities in dental care for disabled persons were identified, linked to unfavourable oral health indicators.

The latest evidence and guidance on disability inclusion: Other topics

Disability and development

In 2024, the UN published its flagship “**Report On Disability And Development 2024**”. It reveals significant shortcomings in achieving the 2030 Agenda for persons with disabilities, with only 5 indicators on track for success. Across multiple countries, many targets related to healthcare, financial access, and resilience during emergencies have stalled or regressed, with large gaps in food security, health, and employment compared to those without disabilities. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these issues, as persons with disabilities faced greater challenges in accessing services, leading to higher rates of job loss and violence. While data collection on disabilities has improved, substantial gaps remain in measuring progress toward key targets. Urgent action is needed to enhance accessibility, anti-discrimination laws, and social protection measures.

Employment

In 2024, the International Labour Organisation published **A study on the employment and wage outcomes of people with disabilities**. The study shows that individuals with disabilities are less likely to participate in the labour market, and that when they do, they face higher unemployment rates, are more likely to be self-employed and tend to earn lower wages. These disparities do not appear to be explained solely by individual characteristics such as educational attainment, experience or occupational category. They are most likely driven by various other factors as well, including limited provision of workplace accommodations in many firms, the potentially greater job flexibility offered by self-employment, and discrimination against people with disabilities. In its final section, the study highlights legal frameworks established at the international and national levels to promote equal opportunities and fair remuneration for people with disabilities.

In 2024, the World Bank published “**Accelerating the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Uzbekistan’s Digital Economy**”. The report notes that Uzbekistan's digitalisation is creating new opportunities for an inclusive digital economy, emphasised by the New Development Strategy and the 2030 Digital Strategy. However, persons with disabilities face significant barriers to accessing and participating in this digital landscape. Building digital skills and literacy is essential for enabling these individuals to engage with digital services and the labour market. Findings suggest that strategic efforts by the government and stakeholders can enhance the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the digital economy.

Migration

In 2023, the Global Health Action published the report **Migration meets disability. Approaches to intersectionality in the context of a disability rights organisation**. This paper addresses the overlooked intersection of disability and migration in academic research and activism. It draws on research from a disability rights organisation to explore differing perspectives on this intersection, proposing a classification of three modes of understanding. The analysis reveals organisational reluctance to adapt to disability inclusive changes, highlighting various perceptions and underlying logics within the organisation. The paper identifies factors contributing to resistance to diversity-related change and calls for broader discussions on including migrants in the disability discourse.

Independent Living

In 2024, Human Rights Watch published **I, too, wish to enjoy the summer**. The report notes that Uruguay is among the first countries in the Americas to provide personal assistance for people with disabilities in their care system but has yet to provide services for everyone who require them for independent living. The programme is riddled with gaps that leave many people with disabilities unable to access the support they need because it is limited by age and provided for limited hours. The report recommends that the government

should involve organisations of people with disabilities in redesigning, implementing, and monitoring the system to ensure a rights-aligned care and support system.

Humanitarian response

In 2024, ReliefWeb published the article **“They Destroyed What Was Inside Us’: Children with Disabilities Amid Israel’s Attacks on Gaza”**. The report states that the Israeli government’s attacks and unlawful blockade against Gaza have inflicted profound suffering on children with disabilities, and explosive weapons have left many others with permanent disabilities. It notes that the ongoing siege of Gaza causes disproportionate harm to children with disabilities, who already faced a precarious situation, and they are at particular risk of lasting psychological harm.

In 2024, ReliefWeb published Humanity and Inclusion’s report **“Case studies repository: How to make humanitarian action more inclusive with and for persons with disabilities - Experiences from Somalia, Somaliland and Syrian crises responses”**. The report presents eight different case studies from protection and food security humanitarian organisations working in Syria and Somalia humanitarian responses. The case studies demonstrate how humanitarian tools and/or operational practices were adapted to become more disability inclusive. The report ends with recommendations to inform replication of best practice, including working with existing gender-inclusive community committees, engaging with the community after and/or during a protection risk assessment and working with community committees to identify how risks and barriers to disability inclusion can be removed.

In 2024, ReliefWeb published the **“User Guidance for Age and Disability Inclusion Matrix”**. This tool was developed by Handicap International, HelpAge International and the Global Protection Cluster. The Protection Analytical Framework (PAF) is a key step to offer an in-depth and integrated protection analysis to provide the foundation for guiding programmes in humanitarian response. Its aim is to strengthen the disability and age inclusion lens in the PAF, and to make the specific and generic protection risks and capacities that persons with disabilities and older persons experience in a humanitarian setting more visible. Better analysis around disability and older age, it is assumed, will enhance quality protection programming and strategies more inclusive of persons with disabilities and older persons.

In 2024, ReliefWeb published **“Violence Against Children and Youth in Humanitarian Settings: Findings from a 2022 Survey of all Refugee Settlements in Uganda.”** The report notes that the 2022 Uganda Humanitarian Violence Against Children and Youth Survey (HVACS) is the first to focus solely on refugee settlements, measuring the prevalence and types of physical, emotional, and sexual violence against children and youth in these contexts. The findings noted that females aged 18-24 who had any form of disability were more likely to experience sexual and physical violence in the past 12 months compared to females aged 18-24 who had no form of disability (34.7% versus 27.5%). Males aged 18-24 who had any form of disability were significantly more likely to experience sexual and

physical violence in the past 12 months compared to males who did not have any form of disability (62.6% versus 31.1%).

Disability inclusion policy news

The International Disability Alliance welcomes the [Human Rights Council resolution on ‘Support systems to ensure community inclusion of persons with disabilities’](#). The resolution provides a comprehensive framework and set of commitments on how States should develop human rights-based support systems consistent with Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) standards, which are essential for persons with disabilities to live with dignity, autonomy and independence, and to live independently in the community, as recognised in the CRPD.

The European Disability Forum reported that eight disability organisations have sent a [formal letter](#) to members of the Paris Agreement, criticising the exclusion of the disability movement from UN climate negotiations due to bureaucratic delays. They highlight that while other groups, like women and youth, have established constituencies, a similar structure for persons with disabilities is lacking, hindering their participation. The letter emphasises that individuals with disabilities are disproportionately affected by climate change and that this exclusion violates UN treaties, including the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The organisations request that the UNFCCC clarify and expedite the process for recognising a disability constituency in time for COP 29 in Azerbaijan. Signatories include the International Disability Alliance and regional organisations from various parts of the world.

Humanity and Inclusion noted [improved references to disability in the final text of the Pact for the Future](#), the main product of the Summit for the Future convened by the UN in September 2024. Specific attention is given to persons with disabilities in the context of the protection of civilians in armed conflict, emerging technology including assistive technology, human rights and social inclusion, youth participation, and strengthening of the UN system.

In April 2024, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted resolution [A/HRC/RES/55/18](#) to extend the mandate of an Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism, which was originally adopted in April 2015, with resolution [A/HRC/RES/28/6](#).

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