

UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

Sharing economic benefits

Input by Ms. Catalina Devandas Aguilar
Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities

1. Policies, actions and trade-offs

Social protection has the potential to support progress toward advancing sustainable, inclusive and just economies for persons with disabilities (see A/70/297). Inclusive social protection systems, including social protection floors, can play a crucial role in reducing the consequences of sudden life-changing experiences and in crisis response, by contributing to alleviate the economic and social effects of economic downturns. They can also play a crucial role in alleviating and preventing poverty and vulnerability, promoting effective access to health care and other services, and foster social inclusion and participation.

Well-designed social protection programmes can help remove social and economic barriers that impede access to employment, and to secure access to capital and skill development programmes, thus creating better income-earning opportunities for persons with disabilities. Furthermore, social protection can constitute a powerful strategy for developing human capacity and promoting full and effective participation. By facilitating access to food, health care and education, as well as support services, social protection can enhance the independence, inclusion and active participation of persons with disabilities.

States must move away from traditional disability-welfare approaches and turn towards rights-based social protection systems which promote their participation and social inclusion rather than their economic dependence. For that purpose, States must implement comprehensive and inclusive social protection systems that mainstream disability in all programmes and interventions, and ensure access to specific programmes and services for disability-related needs, in line with article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The active involvement and participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in such efforts is indispensable.

While the potential expansion of social protection systems may have a higher cost in the short term, the inclusion of persons with disabilities in social protection systems is not only a human rights issue, but also a crucial investment for development. When persons with disabilities face barriers to participation, they are less likely to be able to work, and thus contribute less to the economy. In addition, family members, particularly women and girls, are often under significant pressure due to the burden of unpaid informal care, affecting income levels and the general well-being of the household. A study by the International Labour Organization in 2009 estimated that the cost of excluding persons with disabilities could amount to between 1 and 7 per cent of a country's gross domestic product.¹

¹ Sebastian Buckup, "The price of exclusion: the economic consequences of excluding people with disabilities from the world of work", International Labour Organization Employment Working Paper No. 43 (2009).

2. Leaving no-one behind

Persons with disabilities – who make up for 15 per cent of the world population – experience great inequalities worldwide and are more likely to experience poverty and other forms of social exclusion (see A/71/314). They are also less likely to be employed, receive an education, or gain access to public services. In most countries, social protection systems are not inclusive of persons with disabilities and offer little support to them and their families, with much less access to social insurance.² According to ILO, only 28 per cent of persons with disabilities have access to disability benefits globally, and only 1 per cent in low-income countries.³ Persons with disabilities are also more likely to have poor health outcomes, be the victims of violence and face serious human rights violations in health-care settings (see A/73/161).

Women and girls with disabilities are subject to multiple forms of discrimination and face significantly more difficulties than their men peers. They are less likely to study and work; are more likely to be institutionalized; and are often prevented from making autonomous decisions with regard to their reproductive and sexual health (see A/72/133). Similarly, persons with disabilities belonging to historically disadvantaged groups, such as indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities and persons living with HIV/AIDS, are also disproportionately affected in the enjoyment of rights.

The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represents an exceptional opportunity for States to design and implement disability-inclusive policies to ensure that persons with disabilities are not left behind in development. Discussions on inclusive development often overlook the particular and wide-ranging barriers (including physical barriers, barriers to information and communication, institutional barriers, attitudinal barriers) that persons with disabilities face in participating in society. For this reason, States must consider a combination of mainstream and disability-specific measures in all their national policies and programmes, including in employment and social protection, to ensure the systematic inclusion of persons with disabilities. Mainstreaming, non-discrimination, accessibility, participation, accountability and data disaggregation are key elements of disability-inclusive policies.

3. Knowledge gaps

To measure the progress of countries in achieving the SDGs and ensure that persons with disabilities are not left behind in such efforts, it is crucial to disaggregate data by disability status. Article 31 of the CRPD requires States to collect appropriate information, including statistical and research data, to enable them to formulate and implement policies to give effect to the rights of persons with disabilities.

The short set of six questions on disability formulated by the Washington Group on Disability Statistics provides a well-tested method for data disaggregation in an internationally comparable manner using national surveys (e.g., household income surveys, labour force surveys) and censuses. In addition, together with the Washington Group, the ILO is developing a dedicated module on persons with disabilities to be used in labour force surveys. Other instruments available for in-depth data collection on disability (e.g., WHO Model Disability Survey) could also support the collection of

² S. Kidd et al., *Leaving No-one Behind: Building Inclusive Social Protection Systems for Persons with Disabilities, Development Pathways*, 2019.

³ ILO, *World Social Protection Report, 2017-2019*; F. Durán-Valverde et al., *Measuring financing gaps in social protection for achieving SDG target 1.3 global estimates and strategies for developing countries*, ILO Working Paper, 2019.

data on the situation of persons with disabilities. In collecting and maintaining this information, States must comply with legally established safeguards, including legislation on data protection, to ensure confidentiality and respect for the privacy of persons with disabilities; as well as with internationally accepted norms to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms and ethical principles in the collection and use of statistics (CRPD, art. 31).

The SGDs have also generated an increasing interest on disability research. There is a higher demand for evidence-based practice (“what does work” and “what works best”) in different areas, including disability determination, supported employment and disability-inclusive social protection.

4. Relevant means of implementation and the global partnership for development (SDG 17)

It is critical to bring together all stakeholders— States, UN entities, private sector, civil society—for the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. There are many examples of global partnerships and frameworks for the realization of the rights of persons with disabilities, which have the potential to harness synergies for a disability-inclusive implementation of the SDGs.

In 2019, the UN Secretary-General launched the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS), aimed at making the organization inclusive for persons with disabilities through all pillars of the work of the United Nations. The UNDIS calls for the UN leadership, strategic planning, programming, procurement and organizational culture to become more inclusive of persons with disabilities. The UNDIS also enables the entire UN System, including all its entities and Country Teams, to support the implementation of the CRPD and other international human rights instruments, as well as the achievement of the SDGs, the Agenda for Humanity and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.⁴

In addition to the UNDIS, the UN Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD) is a joint UN initiative established in 2011 to support the implementation of the CRPD by facilitating policy-dialogue, coalition-building and capacity-development at country, regional and global level. UNPRPD joint programmes bring together an average of three UN agencies, strengthening the UN’s ability to deliver as one. The UNPRPD has joint programmes in 38 countries, 3 regions, and 8 global initiatives.⁵

Another important international initiative is the Global Action on Disability Network (GLAD), a coordination body of bilateral and multilateral donors and agencies, the private sector and foundations working in collaboration with organizations of persons with disabilities and partner governments, to realize the promise of the SDGs to leave no one behind, and to further the principles reflected in the CRPD.⁶

At a more practical level, it is worth mentioning the initiative "Bridging the Gap II – Inclusive Policies and Services for Equal Rights of Persons with Disabilities (BtG-II)", a 4-year project funded by the European Union and implemented by a consortium of partners, which supports the implementation of the CRPD and the attainment of the SDGs in five partner countries (Ecuador, Paraguay, Burkina

⁴ See <https://www.un.org/en/content/disabilitystrategy/>

⁵ See <http://www.unprpd.org/>

⁶ See <https://gladnetwork.net/>

Faso, Sudan and Ethiopia) through the capacity development and empowerment of government institutions, civil society and organizations of persons with disabilities.⁷

5. Science, technology and innovation

Science, technology and innovation (STI) offer an opportunity to enhance the autonomy, independence and societal participation of persons with disabilities. In recognition of this role, the CRPD calls for research and development of new technologies (CRPD, art. 4(1)(g)), as well as research and access to scientific and technical knowledge facilitated by international cooperation (CRPD, art. 32(c)). Nevertheless, to be an instrument for social change, STI must embrace a rights-based approach, recognizing persons with disabilities as rights-holders and engaging with them in a meaningful way. STI priorities must be aligned with the principles of the CRPD and not contravene the dignity and human rights of persons with disabilities. Information and communications technologies and systems must also be accessible for all persons with disabilities.

States should pay particular attention to the provision of assistive devices and technologies (e.g., hearing aids, wheelchairs, communication aids, prostheses) to persons with disabilities. Many persons with disabilities depend on assistive devices and technologies to lead independent and productive lives. However, evidence indicates that only 1 in 10 people in need have access to assistive products.⁸ In that regard, States should take action to ensure access and affordability to such products, including by supporting STI to design and build assistive devices and technologies through grants, loans and tax credits (see A/71/314).

END.

⁷ See <https://bridgingthegap-project.eu/>

⁸ See <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/assistive-technology>