

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 16th Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights brought together more than 100 experts and government officials from Asia and Europe. They met in Beijing to discuss the issue of Persons with Disabilities and Human Rights.

BACKGROUND

There are about 1 billion people around the world with disabilities. This is 15% of the world's population. The majority – 80% – are in developing countries. People with disabilities often face discrimination. Many do not have access to education and employment, and are excluded from many things in life.

In 2001, the United Nations decided to draw up a convention to promote and protect the rights and dignity of persons with disability. In 2008, the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD) came into force.

THE ASEM SEMINAR

Participants at the ASEM Seminar discussed how the CRPD can be translated into action. They identified the key messages of the CRPD, examined in detail the major areas of concern, and came up with a list of recommendations.

KEY MESSAGES

1. Persons with disabilities (PwDs) should not be seen as people who are dependent on others. This calls for a major shift in attitudes. The media can help to shape more positive perceptions of PwDs.
2. PwDs are under-represented in politics and in cultural life. A major obstacle is their limited access to information. More needs to be done – for example, captioning and sign language – to give them equal access to information.
3. Children with disabilities should be able to attend mainstream schools. This will make it easier for them to find employment and to be active citizens. It will also instil in all children an understanding of and respect for differences.
4. Services provided for PwDs should be personalised to enable them to live the life they want. The current welfare and medical approach tends to separate PwDs from the general population.

5. PwDs need better access to justice. They should be able to take legal action against those who discriminate against them, or abuse them. They need to be able to easily enter police stations and courts, and to have access to interpretation services and alternative methods of communication.
6. PwDs should be consulted when development programmes for them are being planned. More detailed data should be collected so there is a clearer picture of the situation of people with disabilities. This data collection should be done systematically. PwDs should have access to the data.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Participation in political and cultural life

- a. States should include PwDs in the process of shaping policies. They must recognise that PwDs, including those with intellectual and psycho-social disabilities, have their own will and preferences
- b. New technologies and media formats should be used so that PwDs can make informed and independent voting decisions
- c. Universal design principles should be adopted so PwDs have equal opportunity to take part in political, cultural and public life
- d. States should sign and ratify the *Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled*.

2. Make social services inclusive

- a. Social services for PwDs should not be segregated from services provided to the rest of the population
- b. Acknowledge and respect PwDs' individuality and autonomy by personalising these services
- c. PwDs should have equal access to health services. This includes access to information about sexual and reproductive health matters.

3. Provide opportunities for economic inclusion

- a. There should be anti-discrimination laws to help ensure that PwDs have equal access to jobs and to training
- b. Government agencies should provide disability awareness training for staff and human resource departments

- c. Provide PwDs with entrepreneurship training and guidance so they can start and run their own businesses.

4. Promote disability-inclusive education

- a. Education and research institutions in Asia and Europe should forge deeper research links.
- b. PwDs should be able to conduct research directly and in collaboration with universities.

5. Strengthen advocacy and awareness

- a. PwDs should be able to speak for themselves because self-advocacy is crucial for empowerment
- b. ASEM partners should:
 - Encourage more international civil society exchanges so that lessons and best practices are shared
 - Encourage cooperation between Asian and European regional disability networks
 - Promote university-based disability studies centres in Asia and Europe
 - Create more forums and exchange programmes for PwDs.
- c. Make disability sensitivity part of journalism training, and ensure that PwDs in media have equal opportunities to create and share content.

6. Mainstream disabilities in development assistance projects

International and regional financial institutions should include disabilities in all development assistance projects. ASEM partners must ensure that:

- a. PwDs are actively consulted for the design, implementation and monitoring of projects
- b. Grant recipients should be required to report on disability inclusion. These reports should include feedback from PwDs involved in the project
- c. The projects should be designed so that the disability-inclusive practices must continue after the conclusion of the grant.

7. Ensure access to justice and remedy

- a. Law enforcement agencies, national human rights institutions, and civil society organisations should work together to ensure PwDs can combat crime and seek civil or criminal remedy.
- b. The judiciary and law enforcement agencies should be trained about:
 - The CRPD
 - How to identify and deal with disability-related abuse and crime
 - How to use alternative means of communication with victims and plaintiffs

- c. This training should be done by PwDs or disabled people's organisations so that there is awareness and understanding of the lived experiences of PwDs
- d. PwDs themselves should be trained so they understand their rights and the legal system of their countries.

8. Improve national implementation of the CRPD

- a. States should make sure their laws meet CRPD standards. This may require new laws to ensure inclusion of disabled persons
- b. The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs) makes special provision for the promotion of the rights of PwDs. The SDGs and the CRPD should guide ASEM partners as they work to ensure the rights of PwDs.

