

Disability Inclusion Helpdesk Report No: 85

Query title	The importance of disability inclusion in social protection programmes: an introduction
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This briefing note provides an introduction to the importance of disability inclusion in social protection programmes. It is accompanied by two briefing notes that focus on:

- Meaningful engagement with organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs).
- Disability inclusive data collection and disaggregation.

Social protection is a critical tool for achieving the effective inclusion and active participation of persons with disabilities in society and supporting their resilience ([ILO and IDA, 2019](#); [UNESCAP, 2021](#)). Through the provision of essential health services and income security along the life course, social protection plays a critical role in reducing and preventing poverty, levelling out inequalities and building resilience for all against shocks and crises over the lifecycle ([UNESCAP, 2021](#)). Social protection is a human right and plays a critical role in reducing and preventing poverty, addressing inequalities and building the resilience of persons with disabilities, enabling their full and effective participation ([UNESCAP, 2021](#)).

Persons with disabilities will often be eligible for inclusion in mainstream social protection schemes but a lack of attention to the barriers they face in accessing schemes means in reality they are largely excluded. Having a disability increases the risk of living in poverty, especially where disability-related expenditures push up household living costs ([UNESCAP, 2021](#)). Despite this, only 33.5% of persons with severe disabilities globally are in receipt of a disability benefit representing a significant gap in access ([ILO, 2021](#)). Persons with disabilities were disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbating existing barriers especially for those with intersecting vulnerabilities ([ILO, 2021](#)). It is important to consider the gendered nature of exclusion as disability prevalence rates are higher for women than men (Mitra et al., 2013, in [Kidd et al., 2019](#)). Moreover, women are more likely to be carers for children or adults with disabilities are women, and should be compensated for their partial or complete loss of income with financial support and other carers' benefits.

Disability inclusion is often not actively mainstreamed into social protection programmes, generating barriers for persons with disabilities to access information, complete complex bureaucratic application and registration procedures, and receive payments. Eligibility and conditionality requirements are frequently designed in ways that disqualify persons with disabilities. For example, programmes requiring school attendance such as conditional cash transfers and school feeding programmes will discriminate against children with disabilities who are excluded from education, and their caregivers, resulting in levels of avoidable exclusion

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(Schüring and Loewe, 2021). Similarly, contributory social protection schemes may not be accessible to people with disabilities who are overrepresented in the informal economy as they face additional barriers to formal employment (UNESCAP, 2021). As monitoring mechanisms do not routinely disaggregate recipient data by disability status it is difficult to determine the extent to which social protection programmes include or exclude persons with disabilities.

Policies and programmes that focus on providing social protection to persons with disabilities, to address the gaps in mainstream programmes, are limited. There is also evidence that existing approaches can contribute to greater exclusion or are not sufficient to meet the needs of persons with disabilities and caregivers of persons with disabilities. Historically, persons with disabilities and organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) have criticised welfarist social protection schemes that categorise disability as a state of being ‘unable to work’. When incapacity to work is set as a condition for receiving a disability pension, it feeds into ableist assumptions reinforcing beliefs that persons with disabilities are a burden, and contributing to greater dependence, segregation and institutionalisation (Devandas Aguilar, 2017 in Schüring and Loewe, 2021)

What is disability inclusive social protection?

Social protection schemes and policies are considered disability-responsive if they are designed in a manner that considers the specific needs of persons with disabilities, and ensures they are fulfilled (IDA, 2021). The International Disability Alliance (2021) defines ‘disability targeted social protection’ as the “steps taken by the government to specifically address the marginalisation experienced by persons with disabilities”. These steps might include establishing a universal disability allowance, improving the supply of assistive devices, and provision of support services such as personal assistants and advocates. The numbers of persons with disabilities increases with age, so overall the most effective way to increase coverage for persons with disabilities is through universal old age pensions, especially in countries with aging populations. In countries with youthful populations, which currently includes much of the Africa region, other benefits need to be considered to reach persons with disabilities, such as child support, housing, and work schemes. Universal coverage reduces the exclusion of persons with disabilities but require a higher level of investment (Kidd et al., 2019).

Disability inclusive social protection also requires adjustments in the delivery mechanisms of social protection programmes and the acknowledgement of the economic impact of disability, through addressing disability-related costs.¹

Disability inclusive social protection requires a shift from the historical paradigm that conceptualises disability as incapacity to work to providing adequate support to enable the participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in society (ILO, 2021). This includes universal disability benefits that are compatible with work and sometimes with other income support schemes and/or measures to increase labour market accessibility for people with disabilities.

¹ Disability-related living expenses arise from, for example, higher expenditures on health care and transportation, the need for assistive devices (e.g., wheelchairs and hearing aids), personal assistants, modified housing etc. These disability-related extra costs vary according to the severity of disability, age of the person and household composition, but are often significant (UNESCAP, 2021).

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The case for investing in disability-inclusive social protection

Investment in disability inclusive social protection is instrumental to increase the participation of persons with disabilities, and to achieve the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind, in particular contributing to ending poverty, ensuring healthy lives, achieving gender equality, promoting decent work and reducing inequality (ILO and IDA, 2019; UNESCAP, 2021). Persons with disabilities comprise an estimated 16 per cent of the world's population (WHO, 2022). They are at greater risk of living in poverty as they face multiple barriers in their access to education and employment, and generally have lower participation in social, economic and public life (Wapling and Meaney-Davis, 2020; IDA et al., 2021; UNESCAP, 2021; ILO and IDA, 2019). Persons with disabilities often also face unaffordable healthcare and significant disability related costs (estimated to amount to roughly one-third of a national average wage as they try to overcome multiple barriers (IDA et al., 2021; ILO and IDA, 2019). Persons with disabilities face additional risks in climate, humanitarian and socioeconomic crises due to a lack of disability inclusion in the response, and as they face additional barriers to accessing the information and resources needed to adapt (ILO and IDA, 2019; Wapling and Meaney-Davis, 2020). This is reflected in the widening inequalities in access to jobs, livelihood, education, and specific services such as rehabilitation, assistive devices, and support services. This is further impacted by intersectional marginalisation on the basis of other characteristics such as gender, religion, geography, ethnicity and caste (IDA, 2021).

Disability benefits improve the livelihoods, consumption, health, education and labour market participation levels of persons with disabilities and their households. ESCAP (2021) estimate that a basic universal disability benefit for persons with severe disabilities at a benefit level of 14 per cent of GDP per capita, would reduce poverty levels in recipient households by up to 17 percentage points. It would also increase their consumption levels by, on average, 6 per cent, while households in the lowest deciles would see an increase of up to 40 per cent. There is strong evidence that non-contributory cash transfer programmes in low- and middle-income countries have contributed to poverty reduction, with overall positive effects on health, education and labour market outcomes (Bastagli et al., 2018; Kidd et al., 2019). Gooding and Marriot (2009) found that disability benefits contributed to greater self-respect and self-confidence and lower levels of stress. More than two thirds of persons self-reporting activity limitation in Europe would be at risk of poverty without social protection benefits (Eurostat, 2020).

Key strategies and frameworks

- > The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)², emphasises the key role of social protection to support the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities, and strongly re-affirms the right of persons with disabilities to social protection (Art. 28)
- > ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation No. 202 (2012) puts forward an integrated and comprehensive approach to social protection, according to which people with disabilities should enjoy the same guarantees of basic income security and access to essential healthcare.

² The CRPD was adopted in 2006 and has been ratified by 185 countries as of 2022 (UNDESA)

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- > The United Nations Agenda 2030 has specific indicators within 2 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals related to social protection and disability, indicators 1.3 (social protection) and 8.5 (decent work for all).
- > FCDO's disability inclusion and rights strategy sets out FCDO's ambition for all people with disabilities to realise their right to social protection, protecting them against poverty and risks throughout their lives and supporting their economic empowerment and participation. It sets out FCDO's aim to influence like-minded multilateral partners and governments to develop social protection systems that are more inclusive of people with disabilities across their life cycle. Social protection programmes need to adopt rights-based approaches that address societal barriers and attitudes, providing persons with disabilities with the support they require to contribute actively to society. Ideally, persons with disabilities would benefit from a twin-track of contributory and non-contributory schemes and a twin-track of disability-specific social protection programmes and social protection programmes where disability is mainstreamed.
- > The Joint Statement towards inclusive social protection systems supporting the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities (ILO and IDA, 2019).

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