CRPD20: Recognition Was Only the Beginning
From rights on paper to lived justice for persons with disabilities

KEY MESSAGES

The CRPD

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), adopted on 13 December 2006 and entered into force in 2008, is one of the 9 core legally binding universal human rights treaties. Its purpose is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities and to promote respect for their inherent dignity. With 193 States parties, it is one of the most ratified UN human rights instruments.

A treaty codifying and recognizing a society for all

Twenty years after its adoption, the CRPD stands as one of the most transformative international human rights treaties ever adopted as it fundamentally reshaped our understanding of disability globally. It established a human-rights-based framework, grounded in dignity, autonomy, agency, equality and inclusion, establishing obligations for States to develop laws, policies, and programmes that address the needs and rights of persons with disabilities, particularly as they pertain to their access to education, employment, healthcare, and other essential services. The CRPD mandates States to provide reasonable accommodation to enable persons with disabilities to fully exercise all their rights, such as in the areas of employment and education, including in the private sector.

Nothing about us without us

Persons with disabilities and their representative organizations played a direct and influential role in drafting the CRPD. The Convention is often cited as an unprecedented example of how the principle of full participation can be put into practice and how it can contribute to the development of truly inclusive societies. The process was guided by the slogan "Nothing About Us Without Us," which captured the demand that persons with disabilities themselves must be active participants in shaping the world in which they live, starting with the development of the Convention itself. Representatives of organizations of persons with disabilities played a decisive role in shifting the emphasis on the social model over the medical model, and on the provisions on legal capacity, independent living, and accessibility. The slogan lives on, reinforcing the expectation that persons with disabilities must continue to be consulted and participate in developing and implementing laws and policies related to the CRPD, and in monitoring its implementation domestically.

We are the 16

Around 1.3 billion people, 16 percent of the world's population are persons with disabilities, meaning they have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory actual or perceived impairments which, in interaction with various attitudinal and environmental barriers, hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. They are commonly denied their rights to be included in school and the workplace, to live independently in the community, to vote, to participate in sport and cultural activities, to enjoy social protection, to access justice, to consent or refuse medical treatment or to enter freely into legal commitments such as opening a bank account and inheriting or buying property. A disproportionate number of persons with disabilities live in poverty and highly at risk of extreme poverty. During humanitarian emergencies, persons with disabilities are often left behind, with little or no say in the rebuilding of their lives and communities. Persons with disabilities are not a homogenous group. Their life experiences, overlapping identities and varied contexts shape the types and intensity of barriers, costs and inequalities they face.

Celebration — Taking stock of two decades of transformative change and impact

The adoption of the CRPD 20 years ago marked a significant shift in the approach to disability, moving away from a model of medical treatment, charity, and social protection to the recognition of persons with disabilities as rights-holders and active participants in decisions that affect their lives. Building upon two decades marked by remarkable progress, but also persistent challenges, the CRPD20 anniversary is a moment for all of us to recognise the depth of the Convention's impact: from setting international standards to widespread ratification, the development of national legal frameworks, and a global paradigm shift that placed persons with disabilities at the centre.

Consolidation — Safeguarding and strengthening what has been won

In two decades of legal and policy gains that have led to over 90 percent of countries enacting laws guaranteeing the rights of persons with disabilities, alignment with the CRPD however, remains uneven. The gap between commitments and lived realities remains one of the most pressing challenges for persons with disabilities. The CRPD20 anniversary calls for strengthening monitoring and accountability mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels, ensuring that hard-won gains in legal frameworks, inclusive policies, and disability rights norms are not reversed but deepened and made durable.

Transformation — Shaping the next phase of implementation in an evolving world

Despite the significant progress brought about since the adoption of the Convention, the actual transformation of turning recognized rights into reality has only just begun. Violence against persons with disabilities remains one of the clearest indicators of that gap, and closing it will require sustained action, stronger accountability and effective implementation of the provisions of CRPD. Persons with disabilities still face violence and abuse at roughly double the rate of the rest of the population, with women and girls with disabilities being disproportionately affected. Those risks are heightened in institutional settings, conflict zones, and trafficking contexts. In addition, persistent inequalities in education, employment, independent living, and inclusion in practice demand a renewed and forward-looking agenda. With emerging technologies, climate change, and shifting geopolitics reshaping the human rights landscape, CRPD20 presents itself as a strategic repositioning to drive measurable change in the lives of persons with disabilities over the next twenty years.

The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is the body of independent experts responsible for monitoring the implementation of the CRPD by the States parties. It consists of 18 members who are elected by States parties for four-year terms, with the possibility of one re-election. They serve in their personal capacity rather than as representatives of their governments. The Committee reviews periodic State reports on how they're implementing the CRPD, engages in a dialogue with State representatives, and issues "concluding observations" with recommendations. It also produces General Comments, authoritative interpretations of specific articles or themes in the Convention that help clarify States' obligations. For states that have also ratified the Optional Protocol, the Committee can consider individual communications, complaints from individuals or groups claiming their rights under the Convention have been violated, after domestic remedies have been exhausted.