



Concept Note



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INTRODUCTION

ASEM AS PACE-SETTER

Is your country involved in ASEM and ASEF disability initiatives?

At the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) Education department (ASEFEdu) we have identified “Access to Education and Employment” as our key theme for the upcoming years. Within this theme we will focus on a number of topics related to social inclusion, and how the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) can ensure that vulnerable groups have equal access to opportunities offered within ASEM societies. While some ASEFEdu projects will tackle topics related to employment, gender, age or technology, the 21st ASEF Summer University (ASEFSU21) will specifically focus on youth with disabilities and the shaping of inclusive ASEM societies.

How many of the SDG's can you name?

ASEM Leaders have in multiple occasions underlined disability discrimination as one of the major challenges within the ASEM cooperation framework.¹ China has subsequently hosted an ASEM High-level Meeting on the Disability Joint Initiative² and ASEF has organised an Informal ASEM Seminar on the Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities.³ In addition the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) cover disability issues extensively: 14 of the 17 SDG's relate to issues which affect persons with disabilities.⁴ Quality Education, Good Health and Well-Being, Reduced Inequalities – these are just a few of the SDG's that seek to empower and improve the lives of persons with disabilities.

8 KEY AREAS

Which focus area would be closest to your heart?

While the topic of disabilities is hugely diverse, the ASEFSU21 will limit itself to explore 8 specific focus areas. The chosen areas have a significant impact on youth and should be a priority when drafting and implementing disability policies and programmes.

1) Mobility

Securing freedom of movement to fully access society's opportunities and services

Examples of subtopics include:

- * accessible transportation
- * physical and built barriers
- * recreational activities

2) Rights Protection and Legislation

Protecting – on all legal levels – the rights youth with disabilities should enjoy

Examples of subtopics include:

- * legal capacity
- * national implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)
- * access to the international Human Rights system

3) Economic Security and Employment

Employment opportunities that match qualifications, as well as access to qualitative and independent lives free of poverty

Examples of subtopics include:

- * qualification-matching employment
- * individualised financial and technical support programmes
- * public and private employment partnerships to assist in the transition into the labour market

4) Inclusive Education

Integration of youth with disabilities into mainstream education programmes that are inclusive and adjusted to the needs of mixed-ability groups

Examples of subtopics include:

- * teacher training
- * adult education opportunities
- * affordable assistive educational devices and technology

5) Health and Well-Being

Providing youth with disabilities with high standard healthcare – both preventive and treating

Examples of subtopics include:

- * access to information on health and well-being
- * inclusive and audience-sensitive health services
- * sexual and reproductive education

6) Participation in Society

Youth's ability to influence their personal lives and society in general, while having access to the same opportunities as others

Examples of subtopics include:

- * political participation and decision-making
- * equal opportunities and possibilities
- * quality community-based services

7) Access to Information

Ensuring that information is made available in various formats and that youth with disability have access to it – physically and intellectually

Examples of subtopics include:

- * inclusive hard- and software
- * technological and digital skills training
- * access to public documentation and decisions

8) Attitudes and Perceptions

Combatting prejudices that enforce stereotypes and challenge youth with disabilities' full participation in society as well as their access to opportunities

Examples of subtopics include:

- * Freedom from discrimination
- * Freedom from hate crimes, violence and harassment
- * Combating stereotypes and prejudices

CURRENT STATUS

CHOSEN CONTENT

As it is not feasible to cover all the above-mentioned key areas in depth, this Concept Note touches upon a few selected overarching themes:

- * Key statistics
- * Definition of disability
- * Perceptions
- * Education
- * Economic Security and Employment
- * Relationships
- * Gender and Minorities

THE HIDDEN MASSES

The World Health Organization has estimated that about 1 billion people (that is 1 in every 7 person on the planet!) experience some form of disability.⁵ Of these, about 650 million live in Asia⁶ and the Pacific, and between 80 and 120 million in Europe⁷. Hence, a majority of all persons with disabilities in the world live in one of the 51 ASEM partner countries.

Have you noted the large quantity of persons with disabilities in your country?

Globally, there are between 180 and 220 million young persons⁸ with disabilities, out of which nearly 80% live in developing countries. There is unfortunately no reliable statistics on the number of youth with disabilities in ASEM. Globally though, a 10% prevalence of disabilities is estimated to exist among youth, which would mean that between 110 and 135 million young persons in Asia and Europe have some form of disability.¹⁰

How many of your friends have a disability?

It is also very likely that the number of young persons with disabilities will increase in the future as youth populations keep booming in most developing countries. Medical advancements have also improved survival rates and contributed to longer life expectancy among persons with disabilities, and society in general.

Youth with disabilities are still today among the poorest and most marginalised groups in the world. They face a significantly higher risk of not having access to quality education, employment and opportunities to fully participate in society. While recent emphasis has been laid on empowering persons with disabilities in general, most of it has focused on other groups than youth (e.g. children with disabilities or the elderly).¹¹ Youth up to the age of 30 has often been left out of policy discussions and the crucial transition phases between childhood and adulthood, or between education and employment, have therefore consistently been neglected.

WHO ARE THEY?

Who do you think about when you hear “persons with disabilities”?

Even though some countries have passed legislation that defines persons with disabilities, globally there is no such established definition. The CRPD¹² describes persons with disabilities as including “those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments.”¹³ However, the CRPD also states that disability is „an evolving concept“ and one that „results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.“¹⁴

This description underlines that it is not the individual him/herself that is incapable of achieving their goals. It is the attitudes of society and the built barriers that disable and prevent persons from reaching their full potential.

PREJUDICES AND ATTITUDES

Are your peers with disabilities in your country given the same opportunities you are?

For youth with disabilities the greatest impediment to accessible and inclusive societies is not the physical environment surrounding them, but rather the societal discrimination and perceptions that exist towards them.¹⁵

While most teenagers' and young adolescents' lives are filled with social encounters and exploration, youth with disabilities often experience rejection and isolation due to prejudices and misconceptions among their peers. Inaccessible environments only reinforce these feelings of loneliness and isolation.

In certain cases though, the societal barriers start already at home as families with family members with disabilities feel hopeless, embarrassed or ashamed, hence limiting their interaction with the rest of society.¹⁶ Incorrectly, some families also believe that their children with disabilities need special protection, even after reaching adulthood, therefore hindering their independence and personal development, which in the end can lead to lower self-esteem and a weaker sense of identity. Ultimately these types of incorrect perceptions prevent youth with disabilities from reaching their full potential and living completely independent lives.

EDUCATION FOR... SOME?

Are youth with disabilities being educated in special need or mainstream schools in your country?

Even though detailed data is scarce, the limited research that exists shows that inclusive education is not currently being fulfilled in European countries. It is moreover also unlikely that universal primary education will be achieved in the region in the near future.¹⁷ No figures could be found for Asia, but it can be assumed that the situation is the same or alike.

Again, in some cases the challenges youth with disabilities face already start at home. Some families are less likely to prioritise education as they believe youth with disabilities are not capable of learning, and that the financial and other efforts are better spent elsewhere.¹⁸ Therefore, and as a result of a lack of early interventions, by the time youth with disabilities enter adolescence, many run a high risk of being illiterate, which will prevent them from fully accessing further education and employment opportunities.

Another significant challenge is the lack of proper funding for teachers' training. This shortcoming doesn't allow teachers to acquire the necessary skills to properly educate mixed-ability groups. Civil society organisations have further pointed out that too much of the focus has consistently remained on primary education, while there are still large shortcomings in adult education and non-formal education for youth with disabilities.¹⁹

THE POOR ARE DISABLED

How could we ensure that families with children with disabilities don't fall into poverty?

Global studies and reports indicate clearly that poverty rates for persons with disabilities are significantly higher than for those without disabilities.²⁰ It is in fact estimated that up to 20 percent of the world's poorest people live with a disability.²¹ Disability can lead to poverty, but poverty can also lead to disability. The link between these two can in certain cases end up creating never-ending circles, which can only be stopped through significant societal efforts.

Young persons with disabilities face dual disadvantages as they are more likely to live in poverty than their peers – both in developed and developing countries.²² In addition, households where at least one family member lives with a disability tend to have lower incomes than others. Therefore, not only do the youth with disabilities themselves, but all their family members are also at risk of living in poverty.²³

Due to these poverty risks, a large number of persons with disabilities will find themselves living on the street.²⁴ As a result, the proportion of youth with disabilities living independently is considerably lower than that for the general population.²⁵

WHEN WORK IS A PRIVILEGE

Studies show that the unemployment rate for persons with disabilities is between 40 and 60 percent higher than that for other groups in society. In some Asia-Pacific countries the figures are even higher, with over 80% of persons with disabilities being unemployed.²⁶

Have you had/Do you have colleagues with disabilities at work?

As a consequence of the inability to access qualitative and inclusive education, many young persons with disabilities face significant challenges in securing employment. The lack of proper training and education discriminate young persons with disabilities as they are significantly less prepared for the competitive, mainstream labour market they attempt to enter.²⁷

If not, why do you believe that is so?

The usage of computers and technology is today considered to be natural for the youth. Only a small percentage of young persons with disabilities worldwide have though access to such technology, and few have received the proper training on how to use it.²⁸ The lack of IT training hinders youth with disabilities from accessing employment and sources of information, as well as communicating and interacting with other users online – one of the key characteristics of the generation they belong to.

On the other hand, even in the cases where youth with disabilities achieve high levels of education and training, they are often forced to conform to low-skilled jobs due to existing prejudices by employers. These negative perceptions on the capacity of persons with disabilities do not match though reality as persons with disabilities have been shown to be just as productive and dependable as other workers.²⁹

As a result though, millions of young persons with disabilities are at the moment not living up to their full potential. Furthermore, many are unable to support themselves financially, hence ending up relying on family, friends or social welfare programmes for their living.

WHO CAN DATE?

Are youth with disabilities in your country given an equal opportunity to establish relationships and a family?

For youth everywhere, relationships are an important part of the transition from childhood to adulthood. These personal relationships are in addition throughout life an important part of every person's identity. In most societies though it is falsely believed that youth with disabilities are not interested in sex and intimacy, or that youth with disabilities cannot be abused in such relationships.³⁰ In many societies persons with disabilities having children is stigmatised and in some cases even forbidden by law.

Due to all these incorrect perceptions, information on how to protect themselves as well as basic sexual education is often not made available to youth with disabilities, or it is disseminated through channels that are inaccessible to them. Many young persons with disabilities will therefore come to accept these false beliefs and abstain from sexuality, relationships and intimacy altogether.³¹

Risks are also high among those who do establish relationships, as they, as mentioned above, often lack appropriate sexual education. In fact, a study revealed that 3 to 5 years after graduation from high school women with disabilities are significantly more likely to have 1 or more children, compared to women or men without disabilities, or men with disabilities.³²

DUAL AND TRIPLE DISCRIMINATION

According to the World Health Organization 19.2 percent of all women have a disability, while the figure is only 12 percent for men. In developing countries, the difference is even bigger as 75 percent of all persons with disabilities are women.³³ Young women with disabilities struggle even more as they face discrimination and societal prejudices at school, work and in society – both based on their disability and their gender.

What do you think life would be like, in case you were an indigenous woman living with a disability?

An area that has been studied in depth is the violence and discrimination that persons with disabilities face daily.³⁴ These studies have shown that women and girls with disabilities run a significantly higher risk of maltreatment and violence, compared to that of women and girls without disabilities, and also more than that of men or boys with disabilities.³⁵ Furthermore, studies have indicated that children with disabilities are almost 4 times more likely to experience violence than other children.³⁶

Even if there is limited statistics available on the prevalence of disabilities among minorities, the available data shows that for example indigenous persons often are disproportionately likely to experience disability in comparison to the general population.³⁷ As indigenous persons and other minorities already belong to a vulnerable group per se, adding the aspect of disability increases exponentially their risks of experiencing various forms of discrimination. The situation is again even more critical for women and girls within these groups, who run among others a higher risk of maltreatment and sexual violence than their peers without disabilities, due to their gender, minority status and disability.³⁸

21st ASEF Summer University (ASEFSU21)

AN OPPORTUNITY TO CHALLENGING YOURSELF

As a participant of the ASEFSU21 you will not only participate in dedicated trainings, workshops and lectures where you will learn more about the topic of youth and disabilities – you will also yourself be an active part of the programme!

What motivates you to join the ASEFSU21?

Both during the online preparatory phase and the on-site phase in Australia and New Zealand, you will independently and in small groups conduct research and participate in story-telling activities to showcase your ideas and share previous experiences. You will also in teams, through an “interdisciplinary Innovathon”, propose solutions to specific challenges: each targeting one of the ASEFSU21 focus areas. These challenges will be hosted by national authorities, higher education institutions, businesses and civil society organisations, and it will be up to you to identify concrete and specific solutions that could improve the quality of the life of ASEM youth with disabilities.

Tackling these challenges will require independent research, team work, out-of-the-box thinking and most importantly significant commitment: we believe real impact can only be achieved when serious efforts are put into the process. The rewards are though sweeter: the opportunity to make a concrete contribution to the improvement to the lives of millions of young persons in Asia and Europe.

A LOOK TOWARDS THE FUTURE

The group that probably has the largest impact on youth with disabilities is: youth. Young people themselves are one of the main obstacles that hinder youth with disabilities from fully developing, participating in society and accessing the same opportunities as others. Subsequently, youth is a major part of the solution and a key stakeholder who should be challenging the current status quo.

Do you have what it takes?

Beyond putting your intellect and creativity to the test, the ASEFSU21 will serve as a platform to build mutual understanding and respect for each other. Only together will we challenge and tear down the prejudices and false perceptions that exist about youth with disabilities.

If you believe that you have what it takes to contribute to shaping inclusive ASEM societies, then you should definitely join us at the ASEFSU21.

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ASEF is an intergovernmental not-for-profit organisation located in Singapore. Founded in 1997, it is the only institution of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM).

ASEF runs more than 25 projects a year, consisting of around 100 activities, mainly conferences, seminars, workshops, lectures, publications, and online platforms, together with about 125 partner organisations. Each year over 3,000 Asians and Europeans participate in ASEF's activities, and much wider audiences are reached through its various events, networks, and web-portals.

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„Glass marbles are celebrated worldwide for their structural simplicity and aesthetic beauty. Although they vary externally in size, structure, design and colour, the very substance which forms them internally is the same. The use of marbles in the designs of the ASEFSU21 is to signify that although each one of us is not the same, the elements that make us human are identical in nature.“