



A GLOBAL ADVOCATE FOR REHABILITATION, INCLUSION AND HUMAN RIGHTS



Editorial

Dear Members of Rehabilitation International,
Friends and Partners of Rehabilitation International,
And All Interested Readers,

Welcome to the December 2024 edition of the Rehabilitation International Newsletter. This issue features several key highlights:

- A **statement commemorating the International Day of Persons with Disabilities**, emphasizing our shared commitment to inclusivity and empowerment.
- A report on the **RI President's visit to Norway's Assistive Technology Centers**, showcasing how these centers operate and contribute to improving lives.
- Insights from the **Rehabilitation and Development Center for Children with Disabilities in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia**, featured under the RI Region section.
- In External Insight, we present the **German Government's Action Plan for Inclusive and Barrier-Free Healthcare**.
- Finally, a **Season's Greetings message** from the RI President, reflecting on the year's achievements and hopes for the future.

We extend our deepest gratitude to all contributors for making this newsletter possible and to our readers for your continued support and engagement.

Let's work together to further the mission of Rehabilitation International, creating a world of greater inclusion and opportunity for all.

Warm regards,
Hannover, December 2024

RI President & RI Media

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Message from RI President on International Day of Persons with Disabilities - 3 December



Ladies and gentlemen,

The third of December annually is the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. For me, as President of Rehabilitation International, this is the most important day of every year.

This day reminds us that we cannot stop working towards the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in all areas of life. This day, and the activities around it, are based on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. As you all know, this convention was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2006.

The convention makes it clear that it is a human right for all persons with disabilities to participate in all areas of life without any barriers, discrimination, or segregation. We must be aware that this concerns all aspects of life: health, access to rehabilitation, education in schools that follow the model of universal design, professional training, universities, social life, and many other areas that need to be considered.

In this, we have made great progress in the last 20 years. Many countries have already signed and ratified the UN Convention. This is a very positive development. We also see that the design of the environment in many countries is improving to help persons with disabilities move around, have barrier-free mobility, maintain orientation, and access many other areas.

However, we must also be aware that signing and ratifying the convention does not necessarily mean that the real-life situation is changing. That is why, on the World Day of Persons with Disabilities, we need to reflect on whether the implementation of the convention is truly successful or not.

We need to identify where barriers still exist, where persons with disabilities are hindered from full participation. If we analyze these barriers, we must take action to change the situation until we reach full inclusion.

Rehabilitation International, as a worldwide organization, advocates for this. We work to analyze the situation and to implement the UN Convention in all its areas. To achieve this, we need to develop guidelines and raise awareness—not only in the area of political work but across all of society.

All of us must think about what we can do, what barriers need to be reduced or even abolished.

Thank you very much for your engagement, and I hope that this year's World Day of Persons with Disabilities will accelerate the process of full inclusion.

Thank you very much.

Prof. Christoph Gutenbrunner, MD, PhD, FRCP, SFEBPRM
President of Rehabilitation International

You can watch this statement on RI official youtube channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1uayD1V09c>

RI GLOBAL PRESIDENT VISITS NORWAY TO LEARN ABOUT WORLD-LEADING ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SYSTEM



JAN MONSBAKKEN
VICE CHAIR RI HEALTH &
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**PROF. CHRISTOPH
GUTENBRUNNER, MD, PHD,
FRCP, SFEPRM**
PRESIDENT OF REHABILITATION
INTERNATIONAL

The board of Rehabilitation International (RI) Norway recently welcomed Christoph Gutenbrunner, the new President of RI Global, for an insightful one-day visit on October 17. The trip, focused on understanding Norway's internationally acclaimed system for the distribution of assistive technology, highlighted the country's innovative and inclusive approach to accessibility.

A Visit to Drammen: At the Heart of the System

The visit began with a three-hour meeting in Drammen, a regional center for assistive technology (AT) distribution located 50 kilometers from Oslo. Berit Stølen, a former board member of RI Norway and a key figure in the development of the system, provided an in-depth introduction. Mrs. Stølen explained how the Norwegian assistive technology system operates and why the World Health Organization (WHO) has recognized it as the best of its kind globally.

Praise from RI Global

President Gutenbrunner expressed his admiration for Norway's assistive technology system. "I am very impressed by the Norwegian AT system and have learned much from my visit," he remarked, emphasizing the system's potential as a model for other nations.

The visit also provided an opportunity for collaboration between RI Global and RI Norway. The RI Norway board expressed its support for Gutenbrunner's plans for the organization, including efforts to recruit more members for RI Global's commissions. These commissions play a vital role in advancing global accessibility initiatives, and Norway's contributions are expected to enhance their impact.

A Global Example

The Norwegian assistive technology system continues to serve as a benchmark for accessibility worldwide. The insights shared during President Gutenbrunner's visit reinforce Norway's leadership in this critical area, offering valuable lessons for international stakeholders.

RI Norway's commitment to fostering collaboration and innovation ensures that its influence will extend beyond its borders, furthering the mission of improving lives through accessible solutions.

This article is based on report provided by:

Jan Monsbakken/RI Norway regarding President Gutenbrunner's visit.

NORWAY'S ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SYSTEM: A MODEL OF EQUITY AND INNOVATION - 1

In a world where accessibility and inclusion are often discussed but seldom realized, Norway's national assistive technology system stands out as a beacon of equity and efficiency. Established in 1995, this robust framework ensures that individuals with permanent functional impairments have access to the tools they need to lead full and independent lives. Governed by the Act on Social Security and funded by the National Insurance Scheme, the system exemplifies how public welfare can effectively bridge gaps in mobility, communication, and daily living.

A Decentralized Network with Centralized Vision

At the heart of this system are 14 Assistive Technology Centers (ATCs), strategically distributed across Norway's counties. These centers serve as both procurement hubs and lending libraries for assistive devices. Whether someone requires a wheelchair, hearing aids, or home automation tools, they can borrow equipment free of charge for as long as needed. It means the ATCs operate much like a library, where users borrow assistive devices for as long as they need them. This model eliminates financial barriers and fosters a sense of shared responsibility and reuse. Once the equipment is no longer needed, it is returned to the ATC, refurbished, and reintroduced into circulation (Fig. 1)

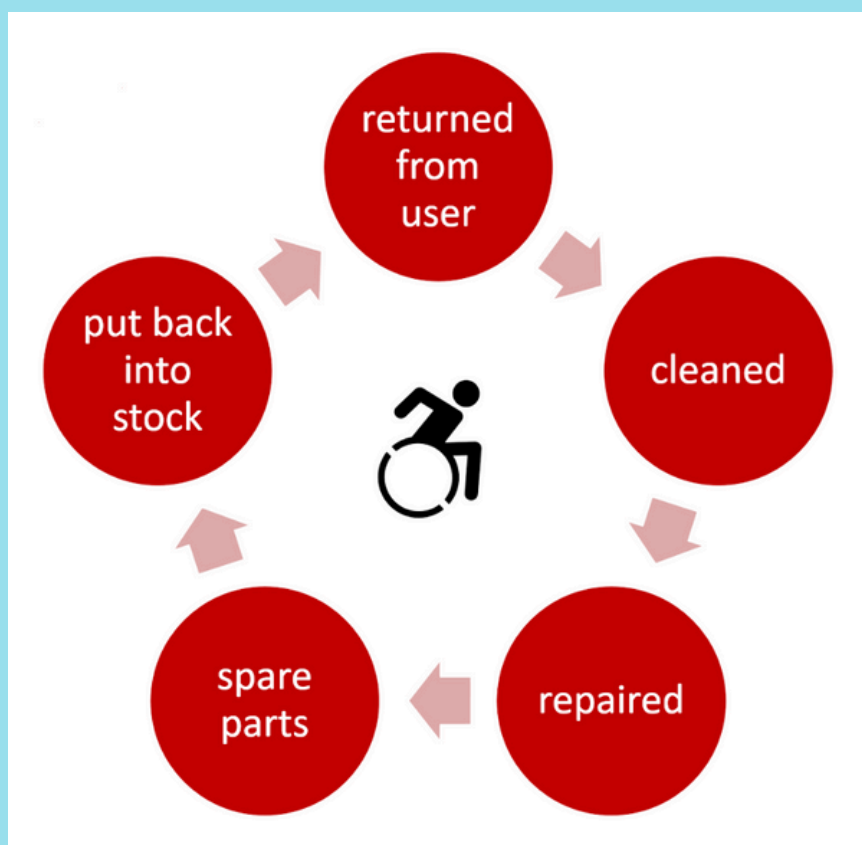


Figure 1. Refurbishment
(Figure from Mrs. Berit Stølen)

This commitment to refurbishment is not just environmentally friendly but economically significant. In 2022 alone, Norway's ATCs purchased new products worth €210 million. Simultaneously, refurbished products—accounting for 30% of total inventory—added €90 million in value, demonstrating the system's efficiency in resource utilization.

NORWAY'S ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SYSTEM: A MODEL OF EQUITY AND INNOVATION - 2

Sustainability in Procurement

The system's success is underpinned by a national procurement strategy that ensures high-quality products and long-term usability. Framework agreements are established at the national level, mandating suppliers to provide spare parts for at least five years after a contract's expiration.

This requirement is critical for maintaining the functionality of assistive devices and enabling the robust refurbishment process. Such provisions allow the ATCs to extend the lifecycle of equipment, further contributing to the economic and environmental sustainability of the system.

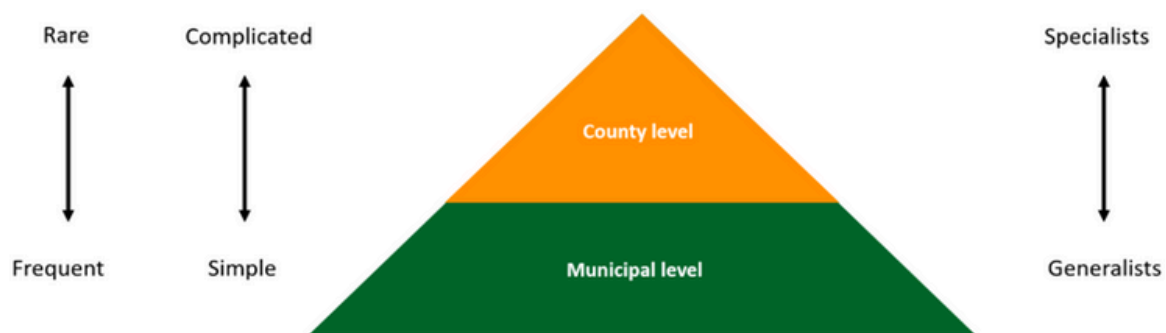


Figure 2. Interdisciplinary Collaboration
(Figure from Mrs. Berit Stølen)

Interdisciplinary Collaboration

One of the hallmarks of Norway's assistive technology system is its interdisciplinary approach. ATCs coordinate with municipal professionals to address a wide range of needs for individuals across all life stages and environments.

Local authorities are primarily responsible for healthcare services, managing frequent and straightforward cases. However, they work closely with ATC specialists for more complex and less common challenges. This collaboration ensures that expertise is applied where it is most needed, creating a seamless and comprehensive service for users.

A Holistic Approach to Accessibility

The ATCs are designed as "one-stop shops," addressing diverse needs across various aspects of life. From mobility aids to solutions for workplace accessibility, the system's breadth and inclusivity are key to its effectiveness.

By focusing on accessibility for all age groups and areas of life, the system enables individuals to participate more fully in society. This approach not only addresses physical impairments but also removes barriers to independence and engagement.

Norway's national assistive technology system is a testament to the power of inclusive design and public welfare. By integrating sustainability, interdisciplinary collaboration, and a user-centered approach, the country has created a model that others may look to as a benchmark for accessibility and innovation.

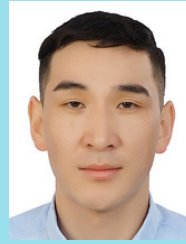
President Gutenbrunner's visit highlights the system's potential as a model for other countries striving to improve accessibility and inclusion. His commitment to sharing insights from Norway's approach reinforces the value of knowledge exchange in creating a more equitable world.

This article is based on insights provided by
Berit Stølen, Senior Advisor for the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service (NAV)

EVERY CHILD MATTERS: TRANSFORMING LIVES AT MONGOLIA'S REHABILITATION AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES - 1



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“Every child deserves the chance to thrive.” These words, echoed by a member of the Rehabilitation and Development Center for Children with Disabilities in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, encapsulate the heart of a mission dedicated to empowering children with developmental and physical challenges. Established in 2019 by the Mongolian government, the center has become a beacon of hope, setting new benchmarks for pediatric rehabilitation in the region.

A Vision of Inclusion and Empowerment

The Rehabilitation and Development Center for Children with Disabilities (Fig. 1) is a state-funded institution designed to support children with disabilities aged 0–18 years. This initiative addresses a critical need: among the 111,200 people with disabilities in Mongolia, approximately 12,709 are children (National Statistics Office of Mongolia, 2023). These young individuals often face significant barriers to accessing health, education, and social inclusion.

The center serves children from all disability levels, hailing from Mongolia’s 21 rural provinces and 9 urban districts. Its team of over 100 skilled professionals delivers a range of services, from health rehabilitation to educational support and community outreach.



Figure 1. Rehabilitation and Development Center for Children with Disabilities, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia (Figure from Mrs Ganbat & Mr. Byambasuren)

World-Class Facilities: A Collaboration of Nations

Situated in western Ulaanbaatar, the China-aided Development Center for Children with Disabilities spans an impressive 20,000 square meters. The 14,990 square-meter main building was constructed to meet international standards in pediatric rehabilitation, with a flat, accessible design that fosters ease of movement.

The facility provides care for up to 250 children at a time, offering both inpatient and outpatient services. Its welcoming environment is a testament to inclusivity and modernity, demonstrating what is possible when nations collaborate to support vulnerable populations.

EVERY CHILD MATTERS: TRANSFORMING LIVES AT MONGOLIA'S REHABILITATION AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES - 2

Comprehensive Services for Holistic Growth

The center's holistic approach ensures that each child's unique needs are met through tailored services. These include:

- **Health Rehabilitation:** Physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, aquatherapy, and nutritional therapy.
- **Developmental Support:** Early intervention programs, special education, psychological counseling, and social work services.
- **Training and Education:** Programs for parents, caregivers, and professionals in pediatric rehabilitation.
- **Community Outreach:** Inclusion programs and awareness campaigns to foster understanding and reduce stigma.

This integrated care model empowers children to achieve their full potential while supporting their families and communities.

2024 Achievements at a Glance

- **Service Reach:** As of December 2024, we served 15,452 children through outpatient screenings, 1528 children in inpatient care, and 1,736 children in outpatient care — doubling previous years' performance.
- **Professional Training Approval:** Authorized by the Health Development Center under the Ministry of Health to provide short-term credit-based training in pediatric rehabilitation.
- **Facility Renovation:** Upgraded psychological counseling and therapy facilities, the child development environment, and the children's library for a more engaging and effective space.
- **Mobile Clinics:** Launched mobile clinics to deliver rehabilitation and psychological services in six districts of Ulaanbaatar and three rural provinces — Uvs, Tuv, and Dornogovi.
- **National Research Conference:** Successfully held the National Research Conference on Pediatric Rehabilitation 2024 and Good Practice 2024 to showcase innovative practices.
- **International Collaboration:** Sent practitioners to the International Rehabilitation Training Program of National Rehabilitation Center in South Korea and partnered with Senior Expert Service (SES) in Germany to host specialists in speech and psychotherapy.
- **Individualized Programs:** Developed personalized developmental programs tailored to each child's needs, promoting independence and growth.

- **Sports Therapy:** Introduced special sport programs such as bell ball, flying disc, jiu-jitsu, and boccia, focusing on children's strengths and abilities.

These milestones reflect our dedication to inclusive, high-quality care and a child- and family-centered approach.

Tackling Challenges: Building a Stronger Future

While we have made significant progress, challenges remain, including limited access to advanced equipment, ongoing staff training needs, and sustainable funding sources. However, these challenges also create opportunities for international partnerships, resource-sharing, and innovation.

Join Us In Making Difference!

A Call to Action: Join the Mission

The center's leadership calls on rehabilitation professionals, donors, and global organizations to join their mission. By contributing resources, expertise, and support, we can ensure that every child, regardless of ability, has the opportunity to thrive.

For partnerships or more information, please contact: administration@rdccd.mn

Together, let's create a world where every child matters and every ability is celebrated.

This article is based on insights provided by:

Uugantsetseg Ganbat (Director, Rehabilitation and Development Center for Children with Disabilities in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia)

Dorjderem Byambasuren (Head, Department of Child Development and Social Rehabilitation, Rehabilitation and Development Center for Children with Disabilities in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia)

GERMANY LAUNCHES GROUNDBREAKING ACTION PLAN FOR INCLUSIVE AND BARRIER-FREE HEALTHCARE - I



Germany has taken a monumental step forward in its quest to ensure equitable healthcare access for all citizens. The Federal Ministry of Health, under the leadership of Prof. Karl Lauterbach, has introduced the "Action Plan for a Diverse, Inclusive, and Barrier-Free Healthcare System." This ambitious blueprint aims to dismantle the systemic barriers that hinder access to healthcare for people with disabilities, marginalized communities, and families with specific caregiving needs.

The initiative reflects a growing recognition of healthcare as a fundamental right, not a privilege. It also aligns with Germany's commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those focused on health, equality, and inclusivity.

A Healthcare System for Everyone

Imagine arriving at a doctor's office only to find a flight of stairs blocking your way or receiving medical instructions laden with jargon you can't understand. These are the everyday realities faced by millions of people in Germany. Such obstacles disproportionately affect individuals with disabilities, those from migrant backgrounds, and families dealing with chronic or severe health challenges.

Breaking Down Barriers: The Key Measures

The Action Plan outlines a series of transformative measures designed to tackle barriers in healthcare facilities, training, technology, and communication. These include:

1. Physical Accessibility:
 - Renovations in hospitals, clinics, and other healthcare facilities will make spaces accessible to those with mobility challenges, including ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms.
 - A focus on ensuring dentist offices and gynecological practices have equipment that accommodates patients with physical disabilities, such as adjustable examination chairs.
2. Accessible Communication:
 - Providing medical information in easy-to-understand formats, such as Braille, large print, and "Leichte Sprache" (simplified German).
 - Expanding access to sign language interpreters and other translation services during medical consultations.
 - Enhancing digital tools, including accessible apps and websites for appointment scheduling and health resources.
3. Inclusive Education for Healthcare Professionals:
 - Overhauling training programs for doctors, nurses, and administrative staff to include modules on diversity, equity, and inclusion.
 - Encouraging the recruitment of staff from diverse backgrounds to improve cultural sensitivity in patient care.
4. Support for Families of Disabled Children:
 - Reducing bureaucratic processes for families seeking healthcare for severely disabled children.
 - Streamlining access to medical, therapeutic, and financial support services.
5. Digital Innovation:
 - Creating accessible digital platforms that allow patients to book appointments, view health records, and access preventive care information with ease.
 - Using data-driven approaches to improve health outcomes for underrepresented groups, such as individuals with disabilities or migrant backgrounds.

GERMANY LAUNCHES GROUNDBREAKING ACTION PLAN FOR INCLUSIVE AND BARRIER-FREE HEALTHCARE - 2

Long-Term Vision and Commitment

While the Action Plan lays the groundwork for immediate changes, it is part of a broader, long-term effort to reshape Germany's healthcare landscape. Some measures, such as increasing accessibility in existing buildings, will take years to implement fully. Others, like improving digital tools, are already underway.

The plan is designed to evolve. The Ministry of Health has committed to evaluating its progress every four years to ensure that its goals remain aligned with societal needs and technological advancements. This iterative approach is expected to keep the healthcare system dynamic and responsive to emerging challenges.

Addressing Diversity and Equity

The plan also places a strong emphasis on cultural competence. Germany's increasingly diverse population includes millions of people with migrant backgrounds, many of whom face unique challenges in navigating the healthcare system. These include language barriers, cultural differences, and a lack of understanding about available healthcare services.

To address this, the Action Plan includes:

- Multilingual resources and interpretation services to facilitate better communication between patients and healthcare providers.
- Targeted campaigns to raise awareness about healthcare rights and services within migrant communities.
- Improved data collection to better understand the health needs of different demographic groups.

Focus on Vulnerable Groups

The Action Plan takes special care to address the needs of vulnerable populations, including:

- People with Severe Disabilities: Increasing access to specialized medical centers equipped to handle complex cases.
- Older Adults and Long-Term Care Patients: Ensuring nursing homes and long-term care facilities are equipped for both physical and sensory accessibility.

- Patients Requiring Emergency Care: Improving accessibility in hospital emergency rooms to accommodate individuals with mobility or communication challenges.

In a particularly innovative move, the plan proposes mobile dental care units for individuals unable to travel to traditional clinics, such as elderly patients or those in rural areas.

Collaboration Across Ministries

The Action Plan is not solely the responsibility of the Health Ministry. Recognizing the interconnected nature of healthcare, the government has involved multiple departments, including the Ministry for Social Affairs and the Ministry for Family Affairs. This collaborative approach aims to address systemic issues, such as bureaucracy and funding, that have long hindered healthcare accessibility.

A Call to Action

"Healthcare is a pillar of a just society," said Lauterbach. "This plan is not just about improving access; it's about dignity, equality, and the fundamental right to health."

The government hopes this initiative will inspire other nations to follow suit. By prioritizing inclusivity and accessibility, Germany is setting a new standard for what a modern healthcare system should look like.

A Brighter Future for Healthcare

The "Action Plan for a Diverse, Inclusive, and Barrier-Free Healthcare System" is more than a policy document; it's a vision for the future. While challenges remain, the plan marks a significant step toward ensuring that no one in Germany is left behind in their pursuit of health and well-being.

As Germany moves forward with this bold initiative, the world will be watching—and learning.

Season's Greetings from RI President



**PROF. CHRISTOPH
GUTENBRUNNER, MD, PHD,
FRCP, SFEBPRM**
PRESIDENT OF REHABILITATION
INTERNATIONAL

Dear RI Members, friends and supporters,

Many of us are celebrating Christmas and almost all of us will welcome the New Year 2025 in only a couple of days from now.

This season is one of most important every year. It gives us the opportunity to refrain from daily stress, to celebrate with our families and close friends and to reflect on ourselves.

RI's mission is to advocate for the rights of people with disabilities worldwide and irrespective of type of disability by promoting rehabilitation and inclusion as two fundamental strategies to facilitate full participation in all areas of society. We all agree that full participation and inclusion are fundamental human rights.

Since the adoption of the UN-Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities by the UN General Assembly in 2006, huge progress has been made, in particular in implementing the human rights approach in legislation in most countries worldwide. However, we must be aware that persons with disabilities still are subject to discrimination, being segregated, are not receiving rehabilitation and health services they need, and many other aspects of societal exclusion. Being aware of this, Rehabilitation International has a huge responsibility to ensure that rehabilitation and inclusion will be anchored in international level and in particular in documents and decision of UN and all its agencies. Furthermore, implementation of the UNCRPD at national level is a major challenge. RI is committed to support and facilitate actions towards this goal. Working together towards these agreed goals makes RI strong. I am convinced that – based on its long history – RI's work nowadays is as relevant as ever.

I would like to thank all of you for your great contribution and look forward to collaborate even more intensively in 2025!

I wish you all am Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Yours

Prof Christoph Gutenbrunner, MD, PhD, FRCP, SFEBPRM
President of Rehabilitation International

Call for contribution

A heartfelt thank you to all our contributors for your invaluable support, dedication, and engagement! Your efforts continue to inspire and drive our shared mission of creating a more inclusive world for everyone.

We are excited to invite:

- **Member Organizations:** Showcase your impactful programs, innovative projects, and success stories that advance rehabilitation and inclusion.
- **RI President & Vice Presidents:** Share your strategic insights, regional updates, and experiences from the frontlines of advocacy.
- **RI Commissions:** Contribute research findings, policy recommendations, or groundbreaking initiatives that shape the future of accessibility and empowerment.
- **RI Regions:** Highlight local achievements, unique cultural approaches to rehabilitation, and stories of resilience within your communities.

Whether it's a breakthrough initiative or an inspiring individual, we encourage you to share your activities, achievements, thoughts, or ideas with us. Your contributions provide valuable insights and help amplify the incredible work being carried out worldwide.

Why Contribute?

Your stories not only foster collaboration and learning but also inspire others within the Rehabilitation International community to take meaningful action. Together, we can create a powerful platform for change and advocacy.

How to Submit?

Please send your submissions to: **RI Media** (rimedia@riglobal.org)

We welcome articles, photos, videos, and any other materials that best showcase your work and its impact.

Let's continue to work together to shine a light on the exceptional efforts that make a difference in the lives of individuals and communities around the world.

We look forward to hearing from you soon!

Don't forget to check and follow our social media:



ri_global



@ri_global



Rehabilitation International



RIGlobal



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Event Calendar

RI Executive Committee Meeting (on invitation)
31 March - 1 April 2025

Global Disability Summit
Berlin, Germany
2-3 April 2025

COSP 18
10-12 June 2025



Rehabilitation
International

**A GLOBAL ADVOCATE FOR REHABILITATION,
INCLUSION AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

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