



SOCHUM

General Assemblies

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Topic 1
Inclusive development for
people with disabilities

October 5-6, 2026

Committee
Social, Humanitarian,
and Cultural Committee

Georgia Tech
Model United Nations

Bridging technology and diplomacy.



Georgia Tech
Model United Nations

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#GTMUN2026



Letter from the Secretary General



Esteemed delegates,

My name is Henry Bui, your Secretary General for the 2026 edition of the Georgia Tech Model United Nations Conference, also lovingly known as GTMUN. As your Secretary General, I would like to give you all a warm welcome as you begin your journey this conference cycle.

Every year at GTMUN, we see hundreds of you delegates spend hours speaking about your ideas, deliberating with others about the efficacy of solutions, and collaborating with compatriots to draft extensive resolutions. It is always impressive to see each delegate's ability to tackle these very significant issues affecting the real world today, proposing novel solutions, creatively applying international policy, and synthesizing resolutions that solve these urgent questions comprehensively and on a global scale.

I am especially excited to see everything you all will achieve this October. With over 1,000 delegates attending, this will be the largest GTMUN to date, and with it, we are bringing you 18 diverse committees to further test your abilities. Each committee has been carefully crafted to open unique perspectives and to allow each delegate to apply their skills in possibly new, unique ways. I hope that in the midst of being lost in deep research rabbit holes and hours of debate in each session, you all are satisfactorily challenged and that you all leave with joy and excitement in the work you accomplish.

Outside of the Scheller building where you will debate for two days, you will find that many of the skills you have used will be applicable to other aspects of your professional career: your ability to speak publicly, to improvise and adapt, and to act diplomatically. As a computer science student and teaching assistant, I have found that my experience in Model UN has been some of my most valuable. It has taught me to be confident in what I say, and it has taught me how to work with people with all different kinds of backgrounds and perspectives. One of our core values at Georgia Tech is that we thrive on diversity, and that is something that shines strongly at GTMUN.

As you prepare for committee, I want you to remember the most important thing you should get out of GTMUN—even more important than demonstrating your abilities or honing your skills for your professional career—is having fun. Not every speech has to be perfect, and not every unmoderated caucus has to go your way! Take the opportunity to try eccentric things in your speeches and diplomatic approach, and take the opportunity to meet new people. Do not forget that you are surrounded by many others who have similar goals, aspirations, and interests as you do! You might find a future close friend. Though competing is quite fulfilling (and the prospect of awarding is exciting), it can also be very stressful, so it is critical to find joy in what you are doing.

Once again, we, the GTMUN Secretariat, are excited to see everything you will achieve.

Good luck & have fun,

Henry Bui

Secretary General of GTMUN 2026



What is a *Position Paper*?

A position paper is a paper which describes how a country intends to address the topics of the committee, detailing tangible solutions to committee issues and connection to the country's policies. A position paper should contain details for each topic that will be addressed by the committee.

Formatting Requirements

- 12-point font, double spaces Times New Roman
- 1-2 pages per topic (excluding Works Cited page)
- A Works Cited page with citations in MLA format
- Files submitted in .pdf format with title "GTMUN26_COMMITTEE_COUNTRY.pdf"
- e.g., "GTMUN26_DISEC_Germany.pdf" or "GTMUN26_UNEP_United_States.pdf"

Start Each Topic Page With

- Committee: [Name of committee]
- Delegation: [Name of delegation]
- Topic: [Topic name/decription]

Position Paper Rubric

In order to be eligible for awards, delegates must submit a position paper and receive a score of at least 12/20 (for single-topic committees) or 24/40 (for double-topic committees). Refer to the next page for the exact scoring guidelines.

Our AI Policy

Delegates are expected to be drafting documents during the span of the conference using their own thoughts and ideas. As such, GTMUN **does not permit** plagiarism, pre-writing, or the use of generative AI during conferences.

- Plagiarism is the act of using another individual's work or writing and passing it as one's own without proper citation or credit. This includes writing from other delegates in the committee or from online sources.
- Pre-writing is the act of writing material for in-conference documents (e.g., working papers, draft resolutions, crisis directives) ahead of the conference. While doing prior research and bringing research notes is permitted (and encouraged), these notes should not contain text that is intended to be directly copied and pasted into a document. Suspicion of pre-writing is subject to the chair's discretion.
- Generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini) cannot be used to partially or wholly write a conference document. GTMUN recognizes the rapidly evolving landscape of artificial intelligence engines as a tool for research. Though discouraged, GTMUN accepts the use of such tools to locate resources and brainstorm starting solutions. However, generative AI must not be used to generate content for the conference, such as in-conference documents and position papers. GTMUN encourages the development of creative, unique solutions in committee and knows delegates are more than capable of producing such ideas without relying on generative AI.

Delegates that violate the writing policy will face consequences that may include disqualification from awards.

	Great (5)	Good (4)	Adequate (3)	Poor (1)
Background	- Detailed description of the topic (including dates and stakeholders) - Several facts and statistics - Discusses many relevant UN documents and resolutions	- Basic description of topic (including some dates and stakeholders) - Some facts and statistics - Discusses some relevant UN documents and resolutions	- Minimal description of topic (with no or few dates and stakeholders) - Few facts and statistics - Misses some key relevant UN documents and resolutions	- Unclear or incorrect description of topic - Incorrect or missing facts or statistics - No mention of relevant UN documents and resolutions
Policy	- Country's detailed history with issue - Detailed present position (or a strongly-defended inferred position) of country - Several references to statements from appropriate officials or documents - Several facts and statistics	- Country's basic history with issue - Present position (or reasonable inferred position) of country - Some references to statements from appropriate officials or documents - Some facts and statistics	- Sparsely describes country's history with issue - Present position (or basic inferred position) of country - Few references to statements from appropriate officials and documents - Few facts and statistics	- Incorrect or missing description of country's history with issue - Incorrect present position (or unreasonably inferred position) of country - No references to statements from appropriate officials and documents - Incorrect or missing facts and statistics
Solutions	- Detailed personal objectives - Proposes well-supported potential solutions - Identifies delegates to work with and provides strong reasoning for selections - Actionable, reasonable solutions which are within the scope of the committee	- Expresses personal objectives - Proposes reasonable potential solutions - Identifies delegates to work with and provides reasonable justification for selections - Actionable solutions within the scope of committee	- States personal objective - Proposes potential solutions - Identifies delegates to work with - Actionable solutions	- No proposed goals or plans - No potential collaborators mentioned - Implausible or missing actionable solutions
Mechanics	- No grammar, spelling, or punctuation errors - Numerous and diverse citations from appropriate sources	- Few grammar, spelling, or punctuation errors - Citations from appropriate sources	- Some grammar, spelling, or punctuation mistakes - One or two citations from inappropriate sources	- Many grammar, spelling, or punctuation mistakes - No citations from appropriate sources

Introduction to Committee

Since 1945, the General Assembly has allocated to its Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Affairs Committee, or SOCHUM, agenda items relating to a range of social, humanitarian, and human rights issues that affect people around the world. As the Third Committee, SOCHUM focuses on fundamental rights that all individuals should enjoy, including the right to life, cultural expression, political participation, the protection of children, and broader social development.

Through the analysis of reports from the Human Rights Council and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), SOCHUM additionally addresses the rights and concerns of vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, persons with disabilities, indigenous communities, and refugees. While SOCHUM cannot pass legally binding resolutions, enact military force, or impose sanctions, the committee plays a crucial role in creating peaceful solutions to global problems. Delegates in this committee are tasked with drafting resolutions that thoughtfully balance state sovereignty with universal human rights.

Disclaimer

Model United Nations provides an opportunity for delegates to engage diplomatically with topics of global importance and explore possibilities for conflict resolution in a meaningful way. Many of the topics at hand may involve sensitive or controversial subject matter. We ask delegates to be respectful and professional when engaging with their committee and communicating with fellow delegates and GTMUN Conference staff. The content warning below is meant to warn you of potentially controversial topics that are present in the content of this background guide, as well as content that may appear in other aspects of the committee (e.g. debate, speeches, directives), so that you can prepare yourself before reading this background guide and participating in the committee. At GTMUN, we take equity violations very seriously and require delegates to fully comply with our equity guidelines. Failure to do so will result in an immediate disqualification from awards, and you may be asked to leave the conference. Please remain respectful in committee, and avoid overgeneralizations as well as take into account individual differences and contexts during your speeches. If you have any questions regarding our equity guidelines, we encourage you to contact one of our staff members. If, because of this committee's content warning, you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to our staff via email at gtmunconference@gmail.com.



Topic

**Inclusive development for
people with disabilities**

Key Terms and Acronyms

Stigma	A negative perception or sense of disapproval that a society places on a group or individual based on certain group characteristics, such as their socioeconomic status, gender, race, religion, appearance, upbringing, origin, or health status
Usability	Refers to the measurement of how easily a user can accomplish their goals when using a service
Accessibility	The practice of making information, activities, and/or environments sensible, meaningful, and usable for as many people as possible
Universal Design	Is the design and composition of an environment such that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability, or disability
Heritage Sites	Landmarks and areas with legal protection under an international treaty administered by UNESCO for having cultural, historical, or scientific significance.
Invisible Disability	A physical, mental, or neurological impairment that is not obvious to other may impact upon a person's movements, senses, activities and day-to-day life
Inclusive Education	Educational approach that ensures all students, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or disabilities, learn together in the same classrooms
Discrimination	The unfair or prejudicial treatment of people based on characteristics like race, gender, age, or disability, often rooted in stereotypes or structural inequalities
Ableism	The discrimination, prejudice, and systemic devaluing of people with physical, mental, or cognitive disabilities
Digital Divide	The gap between those who have access to and use information and communication technology and those who do not

Introduction to the Topic

The adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) marked an important turning point for disability rights. Since its establishment in 2006, the first comprehensive human rights treaty of the 21st century aimed to change attitudes and approaches to advance the rights, perspectives, and leadership opportunities for people with disabilities. The CRPD defines disability as a long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairment that, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder a person's full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. However, the definition of a disability and how individuals with disabilities can be integrated into society remains an evolving concept.

This acknowledgment of rights stands in stark contrast to the historical treatment of those with disabilities. In the 1800s, people with disabilities were considered unfit and unable to contribute to society. Due to a lack of research and unethical experimentation during this period, society often viewed people with disabilities as abnormal. Individuals were frequently forced to enter institutions and asylums, reinforcing the notion that people with disabilities should be invisible and hidden from a fearful and biased society. It was not until the 1960s and '70s that national movements around issues of disability rights began to prosper.

By the 1960s and '70s, a global wave of human rights advocacy swept across the world. "Disability advocates saw an opportunity to join forces alongside other marginalized groups to demand equal treatment, access, and opportunity for all..." (ADL, 2017). From the establishment of the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation in the United Kingdom to the creation of Disabled Peoples' International in Singapore, disability rights initiatives began to assemble and change international policies. Some of the strongest voices behind these efforts were parents demanding that their children be removed from asylums and allowed to integrate into mainstream society. In Kenya, this civic society pressure led to the formation of the Kenya Society for the Mentally Handicapped, which successfully lobbied the government to shift custodial care to community-based rehabilitation and vocational training. These global social movements challenged traditional perceptions of the time, especially medical observation, calling attention to the flawed scientific attitudes towards disabilities.

In the contemporary era, advancements in technologies, approaches, and mindsets have enabled progressive



Child in wheelchair surrounded by other children laughing and smiling

efforts to support people with disabilities. Some of these include new assistive applications such as hearing aids, screen readers, and crosswalk systems equipped with audio signals. While these technical implementations have inspired more public awareness, a considerable gap still exists between theoretical understanding, social inclusion, and the consistent implementation of these rights in daily life.

Entrenched stigmas in societies have resulted in isolation from education, employment, healthcare, and social participation for many individuals with disabilities. According to the World Health Organization, an estimated 80% of people with disabilities live in developing countries. While legal structures exist to mitigate these occurrences, significant discrepancies persist for the disabled community. In many of these regions, the employment gap is staggering, with research suggesting that upward of 90% of persons with disabilities of working age are unemployed (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.). Compounding this, many individuals are excluded from the workforce due to a lack of legal protections. Several of these civil legal issues involve disputes over employment discrimination, poor working conditions, and the denial of disability benefits. The lack of legal enforcement is paralleled by an increased risk of victimization. Globally, research indicates that the rate of violent crime and violence against people with disabilities is four times higher than that of people without disabilities, highlighting a severe, ongoing crisis in safety and protection.

Furthermore, as countries move toward all-digital-driven infrastructure, new challenges have emerged that threaten to further isolate the disability community. Basic services such as education, health care, and employment increasingly rely on digital literacy and accessible technology. However, individuals with disabilities repeatedly face limitations to digital access due to a lack of universally designed websites, digital tools, and assistive technologies. Without regulated internet guidelines being implemented, the digital space continues to be exclusive towards those with disabilities, despite its ability to be an incredibly useful assistive tool.

These systemic issues are further exacerbated for individuals in regions affected by armed conflict and environmentally degraded areas. Due to conflict, thousands of displaced people are forced to navigate daily life in refugee camps that offer little space, safety, or accessibility for those with disabilities (World Health Organization, 2026). Poor shelter conditions, inaccessible sanitation, and uneven grounds make it nearly impossible for people to use tools like wheelchairs to assist with mobility impairments. Moreover, the increasing frequency of climate-driven disasters such as floods, cyclones, and heatwaves has disproportionately affected vulnerable populations, including the disability community. This situation is the outcome of emergency management agencies and protocols failing to account for barriers faced by those with cognitive, physical, or mental impairments. Due to the lack of auxiliary aids, inclusive services, and effective alert systems being in place, thousands are left

without equal access to information during crises. (National Council on Disability, 2023, p. 13)

While the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities reviews and analyzes the implementation of the CRPD treaty, many member states argue that its lack of centralized enforcement mechanisms and its broadly worded guidelines leave room for misinterpretation and noncompliance. As the international community seeks an inclusive future, ongoing debate and policy reform are crucial to guarantee equal treatment and belonging. As the third committee, SOCHUM plays a vital role in creating peaceful solutions to social, humanitarian, and cultural issues around the world. SOCHUM has the ability to make comprehensive recommendations and encouragements through non-binding resolutions to address the systematic issues faced by individuals with disabilities.

History

The history of disability has been followed by a variety of methods, beliefs, and approaches mirrored by evolving societal perceptions. The industrialization of the 19th century brought to light innovations in specialized aids, including prosthetic limbs, hearing aids, wheelchairs, and braille systems. However, with these developments was the appearance of the institutionalization model, characterized by the widespread implementation of asylums. These institutions often robbed patients of their autonomy and conducted unapproved medical treatments on individuals without informed consent.

Furthermore, many individuals with disabilities faced widespread ableism, stigma, and discrimination that impacted social and economic progression during the time. The limited laws and policies during the 19th century were often based on these stigmas, denying people the right to make their own decision and allowing a range of harmful practices in the health sector. Many of the stigmas consisted of harmful stereotypes portraying people with disabilities as dangerous or incapable, contributing to their marginalization in societies.



Disability Independence Day March in New York City in July 1993

With the converging pressures of industrialization and the post-conflict landscape, the shift toward modern approach systems accelerated. While rapid industrialization brought new employment opportunities, it also produced harsh working conditions and overcrowded urban areas that did not meet the needs of all people. This need reached a breaking point during

the prevalence of the First and Second World Wars, with the number of disabled veterans and infrastructure needs for these individuals increasing exponentially. It was estimated that nearly 20 million soldiers in World War I alone returned home injured (Historic England, 2018). These events illustrated the need for support services and infrastructure, leading to the creation and expansion of rehabilitation frameworks for those with physical and mental disabilities (ADL, 2017).

The creation of the United Nations in 1945 set human rights as one of the immediate objectives of the international organization, promising to uphold the dignity and worth of all human beings. The mission was followed by the UN General Assembly in 1948 by adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) to further promote the right to life, liberty, and security of all persons in society, including the fostering of rights in the event of disability. While the UDHR categorized disability as a condition rather than a distinct status or identity, it is widely regarded for establishing the core principle of equality for all and recognizing international accountability (“Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,” 2026). This shift established the essential legal and moral framework that would catalyze the modern advancement of disability rights.

During the 1960s, a global shift driven by concerned parents and advocates across the world demanded that people with disabilities should be able to participate in society, unlike the previous medical models of separation had suggested. This momentum was heavily influenced by a broader decade of global human rights characterized by the rise of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and the international anti-apartheid campaign in South Africa, both of which emphasized global solidarity, personal freedom, and equality. Furthermore, in 1960, national organizations came together to form Inclusion International, with many member organizations created by parents of persons with an intellectual disability because their children were not accepted into the local schools (ADL, 2017). These efforts provided an outline for the international community, culminating in the adoption of two international declarations focused on the rights of persons with disabilities.

The first was the 1971 Declaration, which aimed to raise awareness on the rights of persons with intellectual disabilities and the importance of the role of education to improve necessary academic and social skills. While the declaration stood as another milestone to strengthening disability rights and awareness within the United Nations, its clauses were deep-seated in the idea that individuals with disabilities must be reliant on social security and need separate services and institutions from others.

In contrast, the 1975 Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons emphasized the importance of social integration for disabled people and set standards for equitable treatment and physical accessibility. Crucially, it was also the first treaty to explicitly mention civil and political rights for individuals with disabilities, not just a right to

treatment and medical care.

By the 1980s, member states of the United Nations built upon the inertia of the previous decade by designating 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons (IYPD). The IYPD fostered the full integration of persons with disabilities into societies on a global scale. During the year, many global events were held to commemorate the progress made in the inclusion and expansion of disability rights and legal protections. Global communities continued to come together with the World Summit for Social Development in 1995 and the UN Consultative Expert Group Meeting on International Norms and Standards relating to disability in 1998. These gatherings stressed the need for representation and utilized existing standards to give individuals with disabilities the chance to voice their judgments on the creation of policies.

Despite these improvements, a report made by the Secretary-General during the 58th session of the General Assembly revealed that discrepancies still remained in the implementation of these policies. One of the major obstacles was the failure to have concrete actions to implement agreed international commitments and specific guidelines.

In May 2008, the establishment of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was created to combat these gaps and ensure that people with disabilities could equally enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms, providing a mechanism for global responsibility. The framework supported disability-inclusive policies and practices along with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

In 2012, the MDGs would be succeeded by a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to address all three dimensions of sustainable development: environmental, economic, and social. For the first time, disability was referenced in the SDGs related to education, growth, and employment. However, in practice, the inclusion and support for people with disabilities have been uneven and fragmented. Additionally, there has also been limited systematic follow-up and accountability, calling attention to the ongoing need for the international community to move away from inclusive language to comprehensive action.

Current Challenges

In the current global landscape, a combination of new technological advancements and unresolved historical barriers has created an immense array of complex challenges facing the disability community. While the CRPD and SDGs provide comprehensive international guidelines, notable lapses in digital accessibility, climate resilience, and sustainable infrastructure profoundly affect and marginalize the disability community of today. Furthermore, a lack of focus on intersectionality has left many legal grey areas without adequate protection. The Disability and Development Report of 2024

warns that people with disabilities are being left behind in the efforts to achieve SDGs by 2030, with persistent disparities in food security and health among the outcomes. Continuously, as global crises such as climate change and economic instability intensify, the disability community remains disproportionately vulnerable.

Digital Accessibility

As digital access becomes a prerequisite for navigating everyday life, individuals living with disabilities face increasing limitations. While the current age of new technology has introduced groundbreaking tools to assist with mobilization and communication, many of these advancements are frequently overshadowed by rising prices that many cannot afford. Research in 2024 highlighted that individuals with disabilities often earn lower wages, facing higher costs related to their disabilities and limited access to financial services. This disparity is visible even in basic infrastructure that remains exclusionary; for instance, approximately half of the ATMs in developing regions are physically inaccessible for wheelchair users.

The digital divide has been a significant driver in unemployment for people with disabilities, as individuals cannot secure jobs due to a lack of access to technology, and at the same time, they cannot access technology because of financial constraints resulting from unemployment. This issue is even more pronounced for the estimated 240 million children with disabilities worldwide, as a majority of school districts lack specialized education tools, creating disparities that limit the future economic independence and social participation of disabled youth. Due to these children being repeatedly overlooked in policymaking, they remain in the demographic most likely to be excluded from the school system entirely. Ensuring that learning spaces are equipped with universal design is thus critical for providing disabled individuals with equal opportunities in all aspects of life and closing the education gap.

Additionally, the rapid increase of artificial intelligence usage has opened the door to new risks, such as AI-powered fraud targeting vulnerable populations and “CAPTCHA” security protocols. These protocols require users to complete visual or auditory tasks to verify human identity to access websites. However, these assignments are inherently inaccessible to many users with visual, motor, or



Young person using an adaptive device interacting with healthcare provider

cognitive impairments. A CAPTCHA without an accessible and usable alternative makes it impossible for users with certain disabilities to create accounts, access essential services, and purchase products on such sites. Recent research found that while most websites are partially readily available to be accessed on mobile devices, many have serious disability-related access issues. Such challenges can be seen where a user may not be able to effectively view a traditional CAPTCHA on a mobile device due to the small screen size or hear an audio-based CAPTCHA in a noisy environment.

While there have been policies to improve online access, such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). WCAG is composed of numerous guidelines and criteria by which websites and web-based applications are considered accessible to people with disabilities. However, recent reports have found that these standards do not address all access issues, and due to having different compliance levels, they do not make policies equal across websites. One study found that only 50% of identified access issues had a corresponding WCAG guideline that would address the issue, suggesting that current international standards are not yet sufficient to address the full spectrum of digital barriers.

Climate Resilience

The increasing frequency of drastic weather events has placed the disability community at a disproportionate and dangerous risk. In developing countries, approximately half of individuals with disabilities experience chronic food insecurity, a statistic significantly heightened in the event of a natural disaster and persistent climate change. These environmental changes raise urgent concerns; for instance, individuals with mobility impairments have been subjected to unprepared relocation or, in many cases, abandoned during rushed evacuations due to lack of inclusive emergency planning. According to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, only one in four people with disabilities can easily follow evacuation orders in the event of a disaster, and only 11 percent say they are aware of the existence of a disaster management plan in their community. Beyond immediate threats, environmental stressors such as extreme heat and wildfire smoke pose severe detrimental effects to people with pre-existing conditions, placing them at an elevated risk for climate-related sickness and disease.

Likewise, resource scarcity and limited information remain significant roadblocks during emergency events. Although food banks are vital during climate-driven shortages, data indicates that only three out of five food banks are accessible for wheelchair users. Without adequate communication tools, such as braille alerts or high-contrast visuals, it can be difficult for individuals with disabilities to gain access to information that would enable them to prepare, manage, and adapt to disaster and climate health risks in a timely manner.



A Syrian wheelchair user sits outside a temporary shelter along with another displaced person.

In addition, displaced populations are likely to be hit the hardest by harsh climates such as droughts and floods while living in temporarily built shelters. In resource-scarce settings, this vulnerability is followed by a lack of access to clean water and sanitation, further endangering the health

and autonomy of disabled individuals. Additionally, displacements may interrupt essential health services, such as chronic disease medication deliveries, rehabilitation services, or access to specific medical aid items such as catheters (World Health Organization, 2026). Mass distribution schemes for aid frequently exclude individuals with disabilities by not providing accessible information about distribution times and locations, effectively leaving the most vulnerable without life-sustaining resources.

Intersectionality of disability

Disability, gender, and social identity are closely interlinked through the lens of intersectionality. The term “intersectionality” refers to how various identities, such as gender, race, religion, sexuality, or social status, can impact individual experiences and create unique, often overlooked challenges. While most people with disabilities will face systemic inequalities, such as a lack of physical accommodations, an individual can also face added barriers, such as unemployment, discrimination, cultural stigmas, barriers to accessing healthcare, or limited educational opportunities due to their race, gender, religion, or socioeconomic status (Adeyeba et al., 2025).

The consequences are particularly severe for women with disabilities who are also subject to social, cultural, and economic disadvantages due to gender discrimination. Recent data from 2025 indicates that women with disabilities are less likely to be employed globally, with only 19.6 percent of women with disabilities in the labor market compared to 52.8 percent of men with disabilities (Rahman, 2025). Beyond employment gaps, women with disabilities remain underrepresented in decision-making processes and face a higher risk of sexual and domestic violence than their non-disabled peers.



Group of people with the National Forum of Women with Disabilities protesting against discrimination of women with disabilities

Indigenous persons and racial minorities with disabilities face additional barriers to accessing inclusive education and decent work, often compounded by language barriers and lack of culturally competent healthcare. Additionally, the intersection of disability and LGBTQ+ identities presents unique challenges. “For many people, being both disabled and LGBTQ+ can result in double marginalization” (“Disability and LGBTQ People,” 2026). Studies have found that the LGBTQ+ community reports higher rates of disability than the general population, with an estimated 3–5 million LGBTQ+ individuals living with disabilities. Persons with disabilities are often excluded from the provision of sexual and reproductive healthcare. Based on data from various countries, more than half of both women and men with disabilities do not have comprehensive knowledge of HIV/AIDS. These individuals often navigate a “double closet,” where they face exclusion from both the broader disability community and LGBTQ+ spaces that lack physical or sensory accessibility.

Accessibility should encompass not only physical spaces and access needs, such as lifts and ramps to buildings, but also social, cultural, and economic infrastructure. Recognizing how intersectional identities can shape social networks, support systems, and access to community resources, illustrating the importance of culturally competent approaches to advocacy and support that are inclusive of all facets of a person’s identity (Adeyeba et al., 2025).

Case Study

Heritage Preservation vs. Universal Access

Above the city of Athens, Greece, lie the remains of several ancient buildings of outstanding architectural and historical significance. In 1987, UNESCO officially inscribed the Acropolis of Athens as a World Heritage Site due to its encompassing iconic monuments such as the Parthenon, the Propylaea, the Erechtheum, and the Temple of Athena Nike (“Acropolis of Athens,” 2026). The site has become one of the most famous archaeological sites in the world; however, its beauty came with exclusivity. For a long time, its accessibility was an obstacle for people with disabilities or reduced mobility.

Most historic buildings and heritage sites, such as the Acropolis, were originally designed long before the development of modern accommodation standards or recognition for people with disabilities. As a result, most cultural heritage sites lack inclusivity in their design. Since historic heritage places have various functions and activities, such as tourism and cultural leisure, education, and work, there are a multitude of restrictions for people with disabilities. “Some of the most frequently reported barriers to accessing these places include steps at the entrance or inside the building, a lack of handrails or adequate lighting, uneven flooring, and insufficient space in facilities like bathrooms” (Ruiz-Rodrigo et al., 2024).

Thanks to a series of recent initiatives, the Acropolis has adopted more inclusive infrastructure. In 2020, a new panoramic elevator was installed; in 2022, tactile paths for the blind and visually impaired were created. Visiting the site has now become an experience many more travelers can have and enjoy. These developments demonstrate a growing effort to make cultural heritage more inclusive, allowing a broader range of visitors to experience historically significant sites.

However, these changes also highlight an ongoing tension between accessibility and preservation. Critics argue that such structural improvements to sites could be detrimental to the aesthetic integrity of a location. Many governments fear altering UNESCO World Heritage sites, such as the Acropolis, could lead to their delisting. There is also a pervasive belief that adding accessibility features like ramps or lifts can take away from the beauty of an establishment, as cobbled streets, old staircases, and historic pieces can appeal to the feeling of nostalgia of history.

Current global discourse often views culture as a series of artifacts and monuments to be safeguarded, while disability is considered a series of physical or cognitive impediments to be accommodated to experience culture. However, many monuments have histories of disability, aspects of which are lost when they are reinterpreted through preservation and heritage practices. True universal design in heritage sites requires a shift in perspective to ensure that the reflection of society includes all its members.

Legal Gray Areas

In Japan, the legal status of disabled individuals after the death of a caregiver highlights a major gray area in disability rights. As the population of Japan continues to age, the number of people affected by cognitive and developmental disabilities, such as dementia, has also increased, placing heightened pressure on legal and social support systems. In 2000, as a response to these demographic shifts, Japan introduced its Adult Guardianship System. Under the system, individuals with intellectual disabilities or diminished capacity for judgment-making are assigned an adult guardian by the court to make decisions for a person to manage responsibility such as finances, property, and personal affairs on their behalf (Japan Ministry of Justice, n.d.).

However, despite its seemingly useful nature, the system is far from being effectively utilized. While this system provides strong protection, it tends to restrict the autonomy of the individual. Once guardianship is granted, the person loses significant control over their own life, including the right to manage personal finances or make decisions independently. Critics argue that this can undermine the rights of persons with disabilities by prioritizing protection over self-determination. These issues have also been seen in the United States, as recent criticism of the guardianship laws



Graduating person elbow bumps school staff member

has centered around the potential for abuse and the excessive limitation of individual freedoms.

These issues are further intensified by Japan's "8050 problem," where elderly parents remain the primary caregivers for disabled adult children, creating uncertainty about future care. As similar demographic trends emerge globally, reform of guardianship systems has become increasingly urgent.

In light of these challenges, countries like Germany and France have reformed their guardianship system to prioritize autonomy and balance protection. In Germany, the guardian is appointed only for specific areas where support is necessary, rather than granting full authority over all aspects of the person's life. Similarly, France's three-tiered system of judicial protection, curatorship, and tutorship has created a structure that allows for flexible support that matches the individual's needs (Nishiyama, 2025).

Directives / QARMAs

As the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly, SOCHUM must direct its attention to the rights, inclusion, and protection of the disabled community worldwide. This committee must prioritize addressing the gaps faced by persons with disabilities, particularly regarding legal protection, accessibility, and equal participation in society, ensuring that disability frameworks uphold both dignity and autonomy. Some questions to consider:

How can technological advancements be better integrated to promote accessibility and inclusivity?

How can accessibility infrastructure be implemented in conflict or historical areas?

To what extent should international bodies enforce accessibility standards?

How can legal systems balance protection and autonomy for persons with disabilities?

How can the government ensure that digital reliance does not exclude persons with disabilities?

How can disaster preparedness systems be redesigned to include persons with disabilities?

What policies can reduce inequality for disabled women and minority groups?

How can inclusive development address both visible and invisible disabilities?

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