



OPEN THE BOOKS PROJECT PHASE II

**RESEARCH REPORT ON PUBLIC
INFRASTRUCTURE ACCESSIBILITY
FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
IN TIMOR-LESTE**

OXFAM IN TIMOR-LESTE



Empowering our team with skills in analyzing and monitoring the estate budget, along with crafting effective submissions.
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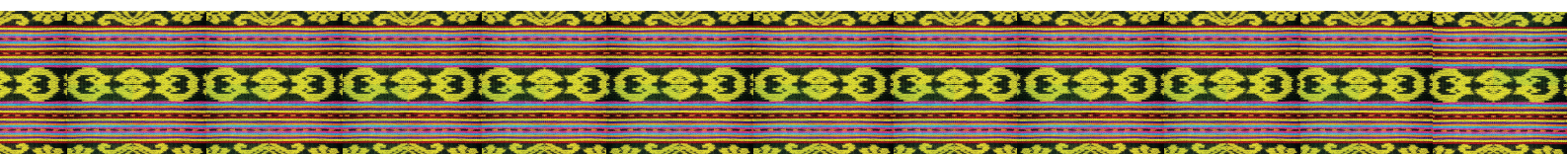
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ABBREVIATIONS

ADTL	Timor-Leste Disability Association
AHDTL	Association of Hearing Disability of Timor-Leste
ASOTL	Association of Special Olympic of Timor-Leste
CDRTL	Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
JSMP	Judicial System Monitoring Program
ALFeLa	Legal Assistance to Women and Children
MNEC	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation
MES	Ministry of Higher Education
MOP	Ministry of Public Works
MSSI	Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion
MTC	Ministry of Transport and Communications
NAP-PWD 2021-2030	National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030
CNE	National Election Commission
KNP-TL	National Paralympic Committee of Timor-Leste
CNR	National Rehabilitation Centre
PNDS	National Village Development Program
ODK	Open Data Kit
PRADET	Psychosocial Recovery and Development in East Timor
RRPU	Periodic Universal Review Report
EHD	Persons with Disabilities
RHTO	Ra'es Hadomi Timor Oan
RTTL-EP	Radio and Television of Timor-Leste
SEI	Secretary of State for Equality
SEFOPE	Secretary of State for Professional Promotion and Employment
SECOMS	Secretary of State for Social Communication
SEJD/MJDAC	Secretary of State for Youth and Sports / Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports
UNTL	Timor-Leste National University
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
ONU	United Nations Organization
VPU	Vulnerable Person's Unit
WGQ	Washington Group Questions
AHDMTL	Asosiasaun Halibur Defisiénsia Matan Timor-Leste

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Persons with disabilities (PwD) encounter multifaceted barriers to societal participation. In Timor-Leste, these challenges include widespread prejudices, economic inequalities, obstacles to employment and education, and inadequate access to public services and infrastructure. This combination of factors limits their full integration into society and perpetuates systemic marginalization. Overcoming these challenges requires comprehensive initiatives focused on eradicating discrimination, enhancing accessibility, and fostering inclusive environments in all aspects of life. By prioritizing the removal of these barriers, communities can enable PwD to actively contribute to and enrich their social, economic, and cultural heritage, thereby promoting a more inclusive society.

Timor-Leste recently updated its 'National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities' (DNAP) and ratified the United Nations 'Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' (CRPD). A critical area in need of dedicated attention is the improvement of accessibility to public services and infrastructure. Despite various national policies aimed at protecting PwD, implementation has been inconsistent and enforceable accessibility standards are lacking. This underscores the need for stronger legislation aligned with CRPD directives and Timor-Leste's DNAP to ensure that these policies are effectively realized.

This study seeks to evaluate the efficacy of existing accessibility policies for PwD in Timor-Leste and gather baseline data to contribute to the advancement of inclusive development initiatives. By assessing the current policy framework, surveying public perception, and evaluating infrastructure accessibility, the study aims to capture emerging needs and assess the advancement of disability policy implementation.

Results show that challenges facing Timor-Leste in effectively implementing the DNAP and fulfilling obligations under the CRPD are multifaceted. Significant institutional barriers hinder CRPD compliance, including ineffective coordination between ministries, inadequate funding, and poor budget alignment. The lack of agreed-upon standards for universal design evaluation further complicates matters, as does the ambiguity surrounding 'reasonable accommodation' policies. Limited access to information and unreliable data on disability exacerbate these challenges, obstructing the dissemination of essential details and hindering policy evaluation. In response to these challenges, several recommendations are proposed:

- Align policy and legislation with CRPD and the Disability National Action Plan.



- Revise the National Policy on Inclusion and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to enhance inclusivity.
- Update the National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities with latest census data.
- Establish formal policy and mechanism for appointing Disability Ambassadors.
- Advance universal design standards through new legislation, extending to the private sector.
- Introduce standardized sign language for PwD and selected civil servants.
- Foster partnerships with DPOs to integrate accessibility measures and monitor implementation.





Oxfam and partners engage in a productive group discussion.
Photo: Aderito Do Rosario Da Cunha Mambares/Oxfam

COUNTRY CONTEXT

An estimated 1.3 billion people live with a significant disability globally, which translates to 16% of the world's population or around one in every six of us.¹ Disabilities encompass a range of impairments in physical function and mobility, vision, hearing, communication, intellect, and a spectrum of psychosocial disorders. Impairments vary in severity, and many persons with disabilities (PwD) experience multiple conditions simultaneously. Consequently, the impact of disability on the lives of PwD and their families can be substantial. PwD are particularly susceptible to marginalization, positioning them among the most vulnerable members of society.

**16% world
population
disabled**

PwD often experience disproportionate socioeconomic outcomes, including lower levels of education and employment, poorer health, and heightened poverty.² Poverty compounds the risk of disability, influenced by factors such as malnutrition, access to healthcare, unsafe working conditions, and inadequate sanitation.

Additionally, disability can worsen poverty by limiting opportunities for education and employment, reducing earning potential, and increasing living costs. Given the complex interplay between disability and socioeconomic factors, it is crucial these issues be addressed holistically.

Barriers to full social and economic inclusion of PwD include prejudicial attitudes and treatment, gaps in service delivery, lack of available assistive devices and technologies, non-adapted communication methods, and accessibility constraints of natural and built environments. It is vital that PwD have access to essential public services and infrastructure, such as medical treatment, educational institutes, credit facilities, government and administrative buildings, public transport, and recreational spaces. Lack of adequate public services and infrastructure exacerbates existing vulnerabilities for PwD and restricts their ability to practice and enjoy their fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Many countries have actively embraced the importance of social inclusion, taking substantial measures to ensure that PwD have access to the services and infrastructure they need. Notably, in the Asia-Pacific region, Singapore stands out for its commitment to accessibility. According to official reports, around 80% of buildings in Singapore which are open to the public have attained basic accessibility standards.³ Progress is also being made in other Asian and Pacific nations,⁴ although efforts are largely limited to improving physical

¹ Retrived from the Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities [EN/AR/RU/ZH] - World | ReliefWeb

² The World Bank (2023)

³ Chua E. (2022) Speech by the head of Timor-Leste's delegation (i.e., Senior Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Social & Family Development, and Ministry of Culture, Community & Youth) during opening remarks at the 'Singapore Constructive Dialogue on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities', Singapore

⁴ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2018) 'Building Disability-Inclusive Societies in Asia and the Pacific: Assessing Progress of the Incheon Strategy', Thailand

access to airports and government buildings in capital cities (e.g., installation of wheelchair ramps), with inadequate consideration for the needs of people with other types of disabilities. In the small island developing state of Timor-Leste, accessibility for PwD is at a very low level.⁵ Records on accessibility conditions across the country is limited, and baseline data is needed to inform public policy, establish development targets, and assign appropriate funding to improve the situation.

Timor-Leste has made notable strides in its development since gaining independence in 2002, despite facing on-going socioeconomic challenges. These advancements include enhanced access to clean water and sanitation, improved housing standards, and extended life expectancy, among other achievements. The rights and civil liberties of all citizens are protected under Timor-Leste's Constitution.^{6,7} Every citizen must be given equal opportunity to access housing, employment, education, healthcare, and social protection.⁸ Yet, equal opportunities are still not afforded to PwD in Timor-Leste and they continue to encounter numerous obstacles, including discrimination, social stigma, and limited accessibility to essential services.⁹ Such factors directly or indirectly impact quality of life, and reinforce the status of PwD as a marginalized group within society.

According to Timor-Leste's 2016 Demographic and Health Survey, 21.6% of respondents ≥15yrs reported experiencing some level of difficulty in functioning due to one or more impairment.¹⁰ Official records of disability prevalence reveal significant discrepancies.¹¹ The most recent data from the 2022 National Census indicates that PwD comprise only 1.3% of the population, although it is widely believed that the actual proportion is much higher.^{12, 13} Obtaining accurate data on PwD has been a persistent challenge for Timor-Leste, with issues stemming from inconsistent definitions of disability, application of different survey questionnaires, geographical barriers in reaching communities, and biases in reporting.¹⁴

⁵ United Nations (2023) 'Situational Analysis Report on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Timor-Leste', Timor-Leste

⁶ Government of Timor-Leste (2023) 'People-Centred Sustainable Development: Leaving No One Behind', The Second Voluntary National Review of SDG Implementation Progress (Timor-Leste VNR-2), Timor-Leste

⁷ Government of Timor-Leste (2023) 'Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022', Timor-Leste.

⁸ Government of Timor-Leste (2002) 'Constitution of the Democratic of Timor-Leste', Timor-Leste.

⁹ Timor-Leste Associação de Deficientes de Timor-Leste et al. (2021) 'Timor-Leste Disability Sector's Joint Submission on the Progress and Challenges of Disability Inclusive Development in Timor-Leste: Universal Periodic Review Report for 2021', Dili, Timor-Leste

¹⁰ Government of Timor-Leste (2016) 'Timor-Leste Demographic Health Survey 2016', Ministry of Planning & Finance and the Ministry of Health, Dili, Timor-Leste.

¹¹ Ibid, op.cit... Government of Timor-Leste (2023) 'Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022', Timor-Leste.

¹² United Nations (2022) 'Report for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Timor-Leste: 40th Session of the UPR Working Group 2022', United Nations Country Team, Dili, Timor-Leste

¹³ Ibid,

¹⁴ Ray S. (2024) Remarks by Mr. Soumen Ray (Chief of Social Policy and PME; UNICEF) at the 'Workshop on Disability Data and MSE', 12th March 2024, Office of the National Institute of Statistics Timor-Leste, Dili, Timor-Leste



During the 2022 National Census, the disability status of household members was identified as the most sensitive topic in the survey by both enumerators and respondents.¹⁵ Consequently, disability prevalence in

Timor-Leste is thought to be substantially under-reported.¹⁶ Having reliable disaggregated data on PwD by age, gender, impairment category, and severity is crucial.

This demographical information strongly influences the allocation of government funds and the planning of programs tailored to address the diverse needs of PwD.

The State of Timor-Leste appears committed to prioritising programs for PwD through on-going design of inclusive legislation and policy, such as the 'Disability National Action Plan 2021–2030' (DNAP).¹⁷ This action plan provides strategies for implementing disability public policy, and directs creation of interministerial services to assist line Ministries and Secretariates of State in establishing and integrating initiatives to support PwD and protect their rights. Ministries are obliged to operationalise policies and ensure that public services and infrastructure are accessible to PwD. However, most buildings and spaces open to the public are still not accessible to PwD. This restricts their movement, excludes them from receiving essential services, and limits their full participation in society.

After much advocacy and anticipation from Disability Persons Organizations (DPOs), Timor-Leste finally became a State party to the 2006 United Nations 'Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' (CRPD) in early 2023.¹⁸ This Convention clarifies international human rights law within the context of disability. Accession to it now positions Timor-Leste alongside the majority of countries in their pledges to protect the rights of PwD. The CRPD places significant emphasis on accessibility, outlining a series of obligations geared towards guaranteeing equal access to public services and infrastructure for all individuals. A recent situational analysis conducted by the United Nations on the rights of PwD in Timor-Leste highlighted that existing public policies, coupled with CRPD ratification, establish a robust legal and political framework that fosters disability-inclusive development.¹⁹ However, their report also emphasised the absence of enforceable accessibility standards within existing legislation. There is a pressing need to fortify the policy landscape to ensure closer alignment between Timor-Leste's disability legislation, the commitments outlined in the DNAP, and the newly introduced directives of the CRPD.

¹⁵ Ibid, op.cit... Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022, Timor-Leste.

¹⁶ Ibid, op.cit... Situational Analysis Report on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Timor-Leste, Timor-Leste

¹⁷ Government of Timor-Leste (2021). 'Planuasaun Nasional Ba Ema Ho Definsiansia 2021–2030', Dili, Timor-Leste

¹⁸ United Nations (2024) 'Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities', available online from: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/crpd/introduction-committee>

¹⁹ Ibid,... op. cit... 'Situational Analysis Report on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Timor-Leste', Timor-Leste

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

Given recent CRPD accession, a timely examination of accessibility-related public policy is warranted to encourage political discourse and expedite formulation of policy options for effective implementation. Firstly, this study aims to examine the efficacy of policies focused on addressing accessibility issues for PwD. Collection of baseline data on present levels of accessibility is required to benchmark schemes for improvement. Accordingly, this study secondly aims to report policy implementation efforts to date and gain insight from the experiences and views of persons with and without disabilities on current access-supporting measures. The specific research objectives are to: 1) Assess the existing policy framework on public infrastructure accessibility for PwD to capture emerging policy needs; 2) Conduct a survey to establish disability policy awareness and gauge public perception regarding its effectiveness and implementation; 3) Evaluate public infrastructure accessibility in Timor-Leste through the views and experiences of disabled and non-disabled citizens; 4) Review progress on disability policy implementation; and 5) Identify challenges to improving public infrastructure accessibility.



Open the Books project training with partners.
Photo: Joanico Herman Soares Martins, Uxfam

METHODOLOGY

This study applied an interdisciplinary methodology consisting of a desk review, a quantitative survey, and qualitative interviews with key informants. Legislation, national policies, academic articles, NGO reports, and other grey literature relating to the protection of human rights and public infrastructure accessibility in Timor-Leste were examined.

To gain insights into government priorities and policy implementation efforts, a series of key informant interviews (KII's) were conducted with representatives (N = 9) from line Ministries and Secretary of States responsible for coordinating implementation of the DNAP. A semi-structured interview guide was prepared to solicit information on the statuses of national accessibility programs and plans for further improvement.

A survey was designed and administered to acquire the perceptions of citizens with and without disabilities. Participants were asked open and closed questions about accessibility of public buildings, spaces, and essential services according to their views or experiences. In parallel, the 'Short Survey Washington Group Questions' (SS-WGQ) was distributed as a validated instrument to report on participants' disability status through difficulties they may encounter across six impairment categories, comprising mobility, vision, hearing, communication, self-care, and concentration.²⁰ Some participants disclosed other cognitive challenges common with intellectual and psychosocial impairments, which the SS-WGQ survey does not evaluate.

Purposive sampling was used to recruit a participant cohort comprising of PwD, families of PwD, community members, and civil servants—with respective ratios of approximately 4:2:2:1. The 'Timor-Leste Disability Association' (ADTL) helped to identify and recruit PwD for the survey. As a starting point, sample size estimation was guided by the summed population of the surveyed municipalities, a 95% confidence level, and a 10% margin of error. The recommended participant number for a randomly selected sample was consequently doubled and rounded up for this study.

²⁰ Washington Group on Disability and Statistics (2024) 'Washington Group Short Set on Functioning (WG-SS)', available online from: <https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/>

Two hundred individuals from the three municipalities of Baucau (N = 50), Bobonaro (N = 50), and Dili (N = 100) participated in the survey. Municipalities were selected to represent broad geographical areas, with Baucau representing the rural East, Bobonaro the rural West, and the capital of Dili representing the urbanised centre of Timor-Leste. Oxfam’s international policies for conducting ethical research were strictly followed.²¹

Difficulty	N Respondents
Mobility	41
Vision	35
Self-care	8
Concentration	7
Communication	6
Hearing	5
None	115
Total	200

17 with multiple difficulties

POLICY FRAMEWORK & ANALYSIS

Recent ratification of the ‘Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities’ (CRPD) means that Timor-Leste now stands committed to upholding and promoting the rights of PwD in accordance with international standards. Accession to the CRPD underscores Timor-Leste’s dedication to ensuring equality, accessibility, and inclusion for PwD across all spheres of society, and marks a significant step towards fostering a more equitable and inclusive nation.

The CRPD is intended as a human rights instrument with an explicit social development dimension. It adopts a broad categorization of PwD and affirms that all persons with all types of disabilities must enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Furthermore, it delineates areas necessitating adaptations for PwD to effectively exercise their rights, areas where their rights have been violated, and areas warranting reinforced protection of their rights.

Article 4 of the CRPD outlines the general obligations of State parties concerning formulation of public policy and inclusive programming to ensure the complete fulfillment of human rights and fundamental freedoms for PwD.²² Signatories are required to enact and enforce appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures to protect these rights, eliminate barriers to accessibility, and rectify any discriminatory laws, regulations, customs, and practices.

²¹ Oxfam International (2020) ‘Ethical Content Guidelines: Upholding the Rights of the People in the Pictures in Content Gathering, Management and Use’, The Hague, Netherlands

²² United Nations (2024) ‘Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities’, available online from: <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability>.



Open the Books project annual reflection with partners.
Photo: Joanico Herman Soares Martins/Oxfam

Accessibility

To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, states parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including technology and information and communication systems, and for other facilities and services that are open to the public, both in urban and rural areas.

CRPD Article 9

Accessibility underpins the CRPD as a central tenet, with most Articles containing access-related obligations.

Article 9 is a standalone set of dedicated mandates principally geared towards ensuring PwD have equitable access to public services and infrastructure.

The CRPD prioritises accountability of actions taken to support PwD. It requires that State parties submit an initial comprehensive report to the 'Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' within two years of the Convention entering into force.²³ For Timor-Leste this will be in January 2025. The report must outline the constitutional, legal, and administrative framework for implementing the Convention. It must also detail any policies and programs adopted, and identify progress made in realizing the rights of PwD. Subsequent reports must be submitted at least every four years or upon request by the Committee to address concerns raised in previous reports, highlight progress made, and identify obstacles faced in implementing the Convention. These reporting requirements ensure transparency, accountability, and monitoring of CRPD enactment. Timor-Leste additionally ratified the 'Optional Protocol' to the CRPD as a supplementary agreement which establishes a mechanism for individual complaints by PwD who claim their rights under the

²³ United Nations (2024) 'Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities', available online from: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/crpd/introduction-committee>

Convention have been denied.²⁴ This protocol recognises international judicial oversight, provides an important enhanced form of accountability, and strengthens enforceability of the CRPD.

With a pre-existing national disability policy framework in place, it is important for it to be aligned with the directives of the CRPD. Public policies which uphold CRPD provisions, and those which fail to support it, should be reviewed and amended accordingly. It is expected that the Government of Timor-Leste as a signatory to this Convention will expediate implementation of accessibility legislation and policy according to CRPD requirements.

The 'Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste' (CDRTL) was adopted on 22 March 2002,²⁵ and is widely regarded internationally as progressive in its acknowledgment and protection of human rights. This founding document extensively covers the safeguarding of personal freedoms and socio-economic rights, such as the right to movement, culture, religion, housing, employment, education, and health. The State of Timor-Leste is constitutionally responsible for ensuring the equal rights of all citizens, without discrimination based on race, sex, gender, religion, and physical or mental condition. Article 21 affords special recognition of vulnerable groups, and guarantees the protection of PwD.

Disabled Citizens

"A disabled citizen shall enjoy the same rights and shall be subject to the same duties as all other citizens [...]." and "The State shall promote the protection of disabled citizens as may be practicable and in accordance with the law."

CDRTL Article 21

The 'National Policy on Inclusion and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' (NPIP-PwD) was established in 2012 through Government Resolution No.14/2012.²⁶ It was Timor-Leste's first dedicated policy on PwD, and forms part of a broader effort to create an inclusive and just society. The NPIP-PwD acknowledges the Constitutional duty of the State to protect PwD due to their disadvantaged position and provides strong coverage of different impairment categories as recognised disabilities. It emphasizes the importance of equal rights and non-discrimination based on physical or mental condition and aligns closely with Timor-Leste's National Strategic Development Plans.^{27, 28} The NPIP-PwD policy outlines the prior legal framework regarding the rights of PwD and acts as a focal document for future policy development.

²⁴ Ibid,...op.cit, United Nations (2024) 'Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities'.

²⁵ Ibid,...op.cit, Government of Timor-Leste (2002) 'Constitution of the Democratic of Timor-Leste', Timor-Leste.

²⁶ Government of Timor-Leste (2012) Government Resolution No. 14/12 'National Policy for Inclusion and Promotoin of the Rights of People with Disabilities', Dili, Timor-Leste

²⁷ Government of Timor-Leste (2011) Timor-Leste's Strategic Development Plan (2011–2030), Dili, Timor-Leste

²⁸ Government of Timor-Leste (2023) 'Planu Estratéjiku Dezenvolvimentu—Reajustadu ba 2023-2038, Dili, Timor-Leste

Regarding public infrastructure accessibility, the NPIP-PwD highlights barriers faced by PwD in accessing essential services. It emphasizes the need to address existing obstacles in physical environments and ensure access for PwD to social services, healthcare, education, employment, justice, transportation, sports, cultural activities, and information. The policy defines and sets out priority areas and strategies of intervention to enhance participation of PwD in various societal spheres through an 'integrated collaboration services' approach across government departments in key sectors and areas of work. Specific programmatic lines are defined to enhance the well-being and quality of life of PwD, including the establishment of accessible support services, early intervention protocols for childhood disabilities, and the promotion of equal gender access to education. Additionally, the policy includes provisions for improving infrastructure accessibility, such as promoting safe street movement, improving public transport, and creating legislation to ensure that public spaces, buildings, and utilities can be accessed by PwD.

Strategies in the NPIP-PwD highlight the need for specific data to be collected in order to monitor policy effectiveness, including on accessibility and mobility. Data requirements include the proportion of healthcare facilities and schools with adapted infrastructure for PwD, and the proportion of the population with convenient access to public transport, disaggregated by sex, age, and disability status. These align closely with SDG indicators (i.e., SDG 3.8.1, 4.a.1, and 11.2.1).²⁹ However, as an oversight, the NPIP-PwD fails to account for tracking accessibility levels of open public spaces (SDG 11.7.1),³⁰ roading infrastructure, and other public buildings such as churches, credit facilities, different government institutions, and commercial buildings.

A review of the NPIP-PwD was conducted by UNESCO in 2016, in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Solidarity.³¹ It was assessed using the 'EquiFrame' policy analysis tool,³² and was found to be deficient in a number of core concepts, as well as falling short in fully addressing key aspects around access to, and delivery of, public services. Several enhancements would help to mitigate accessibility barriers. Recognizing the substantial role families play in supporting PwD beyond healthcare is paramount within the policy framework. This recognition necessitates provisions for resources and support to improve service accessibility and facilitate holistic care. Cultural responsiveness in service delivery is also essential, and should be integrated to acknowledge and respect the diverse cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and practices of individuals and communities served. Incorporating provisions to safeguard information privacy would cultivate trust among PwD, encourage

²⁹ SDG indicators: 3.8.1 "Proportion of schools with access to adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities", 4.a.1, 11.2.1 "

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ UNICEF (2016) EquiFrame

³² Equiframe tool original tool reference

utilization of services without fear of breaches in confidentiality, and may improve demographic reporting for national statistics. Establishing mechanisms to address grievances and ensure accountability among service providers is also vital for swiftly overcoming access barriers.

Additionally, the NPIP-PwD does not adequately take into account intersectionality among vulnerable PwD, which is important when designing targeted solutions with equitable outcomes. Gendered intersectionality is given special consideration in the CRPD. Overall the NPIP-PwD was evaluated by the review panel to be of 'low quality' according to their analysis.³³ The policy has not been amended since this review.

Women with Disabilities
States Parties recognize that women and girls with disabilities are subject to multiple discrimination, and in this regard shall take measures to ensure the full and equal enjoyment by them of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

CRPD Article 6

To ensure successful policy implementation, the NPIP-PwD requires that each governmental department and State agency include activities to promote the rights of PwD in their annual action plans and allocate an adequate budget for this purpose. However, the policy lacks the specific guidance for program implementation, failing to provide a comprehensive and clear outline of processes and mechanisms. Nevertheless, The NPIP-PwD offers a robust guiding vision and supports various CRPD directives. It articulates a clear intent to enhance access to public services and infrastructure and advocates for the establishment of an independent 'National Council for the Rights of People with Disabilities' to harmonize measures and oversee its implementation. Additionally, the NPIP-PwD emphasizes the importance of developing a complementary national action plan for PwD and calls for ratification of the the CRPD.

The 'National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030' (DNAP) was developed to support implementation of the NPIP-PwD across all sectors by steering inter-ministerial efforts in formulating actionable programs.³⁴ For a policy to be impactful, it requires a strong action plan that not only translates strategic priorities into actionable initiatives but also improves program efficiency, transparency, and effectiveness. Action plans should ideally facilitate coordination among various sectors and stakeholders, address obstacles, enable progress monitoring, promote accountability, and incentivize transition from project-based to program financing.

³³ Ibid,...op.cit, Government of Timor-Leste (2011) Timor-Leste's Strategic Development Plan (2011–2030)

³⁴ Ibid,...op.cit, Ray S. (2024) Remarks by Mr. Soumen Ray (Chief of Social Policy and PME; UNICEF) at the 'Workshop on Disability Data and M&E'.

The DNAP had a prolonged development period. A draft version was proposed in 2014 to integrate with the NPIP-PwD but it lacked formal endorsement.³⁵ Recognizing the need for improvement, in 2019 the government engaged in an inclusive process to revise the action plan in collaboration with DPOs, and with the forethought of future CRPD accession. The DNAP 2021–2030 was finally accepted in 2021 and serves to assist each line Ministry and Secretary of State in developing their programs and budgets to support PwD. Targets outlined in the action plan includes the review and amendment of all public policy to align with the CRPD by the end of 2025.

The ‘Resolution to Promote and Protect the Rights of People with Disabilities’ was endorsed by the National Parliament in 2019 under Resolution No. 21/2019.³⁶ This policy emerged following a national seminar on achieving the ‘Sustainable Development Goals’ (SDGs) by 2030; the SDG agenda emphasizes the core principle of ‘leaving no one behind’. Driven by the imperative for inclusive planning and budgeting for PwD and gender equality, the parliamentary resolution acknowledges the intersecting vulnerabilities experienced by women with disabilities. This concise policy complements the DNAP by delineating twelve strategic provisions aimed at enhancing access to healthcare, education, employment, vocational training, and the judicial system. With specific focal points on infrastructure accessibility, the policy advocates for schools to be equipped with facilities and resources tailored to the needs of children with disabilities. It also advocates for increased adoption of sign language on national television broadcasts and during court proceedings, and the installation of traffic lights that enable PwD to move independently and safely. Additionally, the policy calls for the establishment of legal frameworks and physical infrastructure to ensure that public buildings and spaces are equipped with access-supporting features. This resolution aligns well with Article 9 of the CRPD in accessibility.

Concerning access to employment, the ‘Labour Code’ established by Law No. 4/2012 provides specific provisions aimed at addressing the needs of workers with disabilities. With a focus on equality, Article 71 endeavors to prevent discrimination against PwD in their employment opportunities, professional development, promotion, and working conditions. Moreover, Article 75 mandates that employers accommodate unique requirements of employees with disabilities by adjusting their job roles and schedules accordingly. While this legislation commendably promotes fairness for PwD, it lacks explicit provisions requiring infrastructure improvements to physical workplace environments, which are essential to facilitate access.

³⁵ Timor-Leste Disability National Action Plan for 2014 (Old Version).

³⁶ Resolution 14/2019 promotion of Persons with Disability.

Introduction of the forward-thinking 'National Inclusive Education Policy' (NIEP) in 2017 marked a pivotal step towards promoting education accessibility for vulnerable children at primary and secondary levels. This policy not only prioritizes the educational needs of children with disabilities but also emphasizes the importance of inclusion for broader marginalized demographics. Serving as a guiding framework, the NIEP facilitates the Ministry of Education in making essential adjustments to school infrastructure and surroundings. These adjustments encompass the incorporation of features such as access ramps, support rails, disability-friendly roadways and pathways, and inclusive water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities. The policy includes provisions for adapting assistive tools like Braille materials and audio technology, while also delineating examples of inclusive teaching methodologies tailored for children and adolescents with specific impairments. Notably, the policy advocates for the provision of dedicated services in special schools for children with significant mental disabilities who may face challenges in effectively accessing mainstream public education.

The NIEP additionally emphasizes the need to strengthen data collection, monitoring, and analysis mechanisms relevant to inclusive education. Furthermore, it advocates for inter-ministerial coordination to address interconnected challenges spanning the Ministries of Health, Education, and Social Affairs, as well as engagement with civil society. Regarding post-secondary education, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Culture issued the 'Standard Booklet for the Licensing of Higher Education Institutions' in 2020 through Ministerial Order No. 090/GM/MESCC/II/2020. This directive delineates criteria for institutional licensing, including provisions for mobility requirements tailored to PwD, thereby ensuring accessibility of universities and other tertiary education establishments. Collectively, these policies uphold obligations outlined in the CRPD by expanding educational opportunities for youth with disabilities through fundamental infrastructure enhancements.

An order for the implementation of universal design standards was issued by the Ministry of Public Works (MOP) in 2020 through Dispatch No. 07/MOP/VIII/2020. This order promotes improved accessibility for individuals with reduced mobility in public and commercial buildings and spaces. The dispatch highlights the constitutional recognition of citizens' equality and aims to eliminate discrimination against those with mobility impairments. Although it does not explicitly use the phrase 'universal design standards', annexed are a set of technical accessibility rules for public infrastructure which align with such standards. For example, engineering requirements are given for elevators, ramps, corridors, doors, stairs, handrails, WASH facilities, sidewalks, curbs, and pedestrian crossings. These rules are to be applied to all new construction projects, and during refurbishment of existing infrastructure. The importance of ensuring unrestricted mobility through proper drainage in urban areas is also emphasized.



The MOP dispatch recognises that the technical specifications outlined only provide measures to enhance physical accessibility. A clear policy gap in this area is the lack of universal design standards which cater not only for persons with physical mobility impairments, but also for those with other disabilities. The MOP anticipates that more comprehensive measures will be developed and integrated into necessary building construction law. This dispatch strongly supports CRPD provisions towards ensuring universally designed public infrastructure, and is the first policy to give clear instruction on practical solutions. However, it is weak on enforceability and is not well-scoped outside of urban areas. Given that the MOP holds authority over the licensing and oversight of all urban construction projects, adherence to their directives should naturally facilitate broad adoption of fundamental universal design principles within major urban centers. It is crucial that further steps be taken to ensure effective enforcement mechanisms through legislative development and to extend these standards of governance within rural areas.

Emerging policy needs in Timor-Leste necessitate a focused approach to address gaps identified in current legislation and policy frameworks regarding the rights and accessibility of PwD. As Timor-Leste commits to upholding the principles outlined in the CRPD, it becomes imperative to align existing policies, such as NPIP-PwD and DNAP, with CRPD directives. There is a pressing need for enhanced clarity and specificity within policies to ensure effective implementation and enforcement. Furthermore, emerging policy initiatives should prioritize the incorporation of universal design standards to cater not only to physical mobility impairments but also to the diverse needs of all individuals with disabilities. Strengthening mechanisms for data collection, monitoring, and evaluation, particularly in areas such as infrastructure accessibility and service delivery, will be critical for measuring progress and identifying areas for improvement. Additionally, fostering inter-ministerial coordination and collaboration with DPOs will enhance the holistic approach to addressing

the multifaceted challenges faced by PwD. Ultimately, future policy endeavors should strive to bridge existing gaps, promote inclusivity, and uphold the fundamental rights of all citizens, thereby fostering a more equitable and accessible society in line with international standards and obligations.

PUBLIC POLICY AWARENESS

Shifting focus from the evaluation of policy frameworks to an exploration of public awareness, it is important to examine the level of understanding and recognition among citizens regarding disability policies. This transition highlights the interconnectedness between policy formulation and public engagement, emphasizing the need for inclusive and accessible policy communication strategies. Public awareness of disability policy is essential for ensuring fairness towards PwD and addressing widespread stigmas and discrimination. Through a clear grasp of these policies, communities can cultivate respect and advocate for necessary accommodations and accessibility measures. Informed participation in public policy empowers individuals of all abilities to actively contribute to society, promote inclusivity, and advance principles of justice.



In the current study, awareness of different policies and their implementation measures to support PwD varied among the surveyed population. Overall, the majority (58%) were largely unaware of provisions and government initiatives in this realm, while others indicated being partly (25%) or highly (17%) aware. Notably, self-reported awareness was not higher for PwD and their family members compared to the rest of respondents.



A higher proportion of PwD and their relatives proclaimed themselves to be less aware of policies and programs set to benefit them. Survey responses were converted to a single Public Policy Awareness (PPA) Score with a range of 0–10 to contrast the different participant groups; higher values reflect greater awareness. PwD and their families had low PPA Scores of 2.4 and 2.1, respectively. General members of the community and civil servants self-reported greater policy awareness with PPA Scores of 3.8 and 5.0, respectively. Some civil servants may have professional experience in disability-related initiatives, increasing the group's overall awareness level. Results may also stem from a perception among those without direct experience of PwD that they possess greater insight and connection than they actually do. Nonetheless, the prevalent lack of knowledge among PwD and their families about policies and programs aimed at supporting them is concerning, and highlights the need for improved socialisation of provisions and services.

Policy Awareness Scores by Status



Those with knowledge of disability-related policy voted on which policies and programs they consider most effective in providing benefits to PwD. Respondents were presented with a list of nine key policies and programs (Appendix III), from which they could select multiple options. Ranked first was the 'National Policy on Inclusion and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities', followed by the 'Inclusive Education Policy,' with 77% and 75% of respondents deeming them effective, respectively. The 'Policy for Access to Credit in Banks or Cooperatives' and the 'Elderly Subsidy Program' were ranked last, yet 43–45% of respondents still considered them supportive of PwD. Overall, while there appears to be moderate to high confidence in the efficacy and benefits of disability-related policies among those surveyed, reports from various sources indicate extensive disconnects between policy intent and realised outcomes.REF This discordance underscores the significance of aligning policy objectives with tangible results, allocating resources efficiently, and ensuring that monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are robustly implemented.

Participants were invited to provide recommendations for policy enhancement. Responses emphasized the urgent need for universally designed infrastructure to address accessibility barriers. The importance of renovating existing public buildings was highlighted. Policy suggestions included enforcing accessibility standards for new constructions, incorporating an accessibility criterion into the 'Bill of Quantities' for new buildings, integrating accessibility considerations into ministry budget plans, and implementing obligatory

accessibility strategies for public buildings. Prioritizing the repair and upgrade of roading infrastructure and enhancing access to healthcare and education also emerged as key priorities. Recommendations included providing special infrastructure to support PwD when crossing roads, establishing schools closer to communities, and ensuring accessible public transport and WASH facilities. Emphasis was placed on effective government program implementation and the involvement of PwD in policy and decision-making processes. Respondents advocated for proactive engagement on accessibility matters.

Levels of policy awareness offers insights into the extent to which disability policies are effectively communicated and understood by the general populace. This knowledge serves as a foundation for fostering inclusive environments. Individuals' subjective experiences and interpretations of accessibility, as highlighted in the next section, may be influenced by their awareness of existing policies. Discrepancies between perceived and objective accessibility can arise due to various factors, including the dissemination of information about disability policies. Furthermore, public awareness of disability policy informs the level of societal support and advocacy for inclusive measures. Inadequate awareness may lead to insufficient prioritization of accessibility initiatives and limited public demand for inclusive infrastructure. Conversely, heightened awareness can drive collective action and pressure on authorities to prioritize and implement inclusive policies effectively. This understanding underscores the importance of education, advocacy, and practical measures to bridge existing gaps in policy implementation.

In summary, these findings imply a significant need for enhanced public knowledge and targeted support for PwD and their families. The discrepancy between perceived and actual policy effectiveness highlights the importance of improved evaluation mechanisms. Ensuring universally designed infrastructure, proactive government involvement, and inclusive policy implementation are essential steps to address accessibility barriers and enhance the well-being of PwD. Assessing public awareness of disability policies can help to understand how accessibility is perceived by people with and without disabilities, and advocate for inclusive measures to support PwD in Timor-Leste.



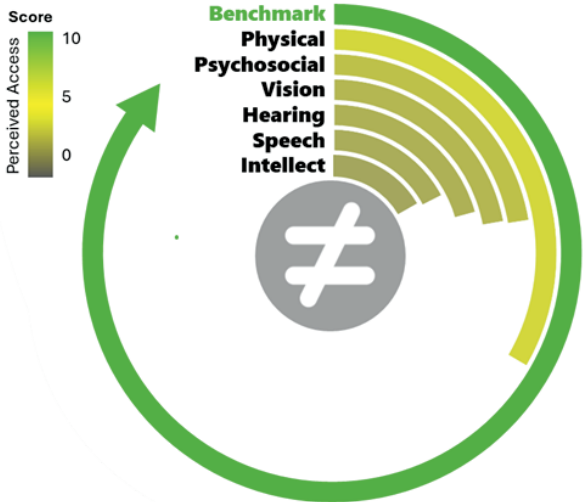
Oxfam and partners engage in a discussion.
Photo: Aderito Do Rosario Da Cunha Mambares/Oxfam

PERCIEVED INFRASTRUCUTE ACCESSIBILITY

Baseline data on accessibility of public services and infrastructure in Timor-Leste is limited. This study assessed percieved accessibility based on the views and experiences of people with and without disabilities. It is important to note that perceived accessibility differs from objective accessibility. While objective accessibility refers to the actual physical availability and ease of use of facilities, perceived accessibility reflects individuals' subjective experiences and interpretations of accessibility. Inconsistency between the two can arise due to various factors, including infrastructure design, information dissemination, and socio-economic disparities. For instance, a public transportation system may be objectively accessible with wheelchair ramps and designated seating areas, yet PwD may perceive it as inaccessible due to challenges in navigating routes, inadequate assistance, or levels of comfort. Therefore, understanding and addressing both perceived and objective accessibility are crucial for fostering inclusive environments and ensuring equitable access to essential services for all members of society.

Based on this study's survey results, public infrastructure accessibility for PwD is generally deemed to be at a very low level nationally. Respondents also viewed or experienced accessibility to be unequal for individuals with different types of impairment. Access is considered greatest for those with physical or mobility impairments and was awarded a 'Perceived Accessibility' (PA) Score of 3.4 out of 10. For those with communication and intellectual impairments, accessibility is considered marginal, with PA Scores of 1.8 and 1.7, respectively.

Accessibility Scores by Impairment Type



Access Measures in Public Buildings & Spaces



To guage broad accessibility across different infrastrucuture, participants were asked whether they had observed any measures to support PwD in particular public buildings and spaces they had visited. Many respondants (39%) had observed basic access-supporting measures in some schools, and a significant proportion also noted special facilities in hospitals and some medical

clinics. Such features in churches were only observed by 9% of respondents, all of which were residents of Dili. Very few (4–8%) had seen special facilities for PwD in village administration offices, banks or credit institutions, public parks or recreation sites, nor integrated into roading infrastructure.

The findings suggest that efforts to improve accessibility are being implemented to an extent within the health and education sectors. Yet, the absence of observed measures in other domains signals that barriers to social inclusion are prevalent, resulting in multiple infringements upon the constitutional rights of PwD.

Being able to control one's personal economic affairs and having access to financial credit and loans is a fundamental right, as addressed in Article 12 of the CRPD. If PwD cannot access institutions that provide financial services, they are effectively denied this

right, perpetuating economic exclusion and hindering their financial independence and participation in society. In a similar vein, access to places of worship is important to afford PwD the capacity to practice their right to religion equally with other citizens, a key provision within Timor-Leste's Constitution.

Although access-supporting measures in some schools and healthcare facilities had been observed by many survey respondents, these measures are not widespread and, when provided, typically only target persons with mobility difficulties. Most schools in Timor-Leste lack basic accommodations like wheelchair ramps and handrails, and are not physically accessible to PwD. Measures to assist people with hearing, vision, and mental impairments in both the education and health sectors are rare. Particularly worrying are the challenges PwD face in accessing essential healthcare services, especially for those who should be receiving regular care and assistance due to their disability.

PwD in Timor-Leste encounter significant challenges with mobility stemming from inadequate design and maintenance of road infrastructure, including bridges and sidewalks, as well as limited access to public transport and personal motor vehicles. The inability to move freely restricts individual agency, hinders equal social participation, and exacerbates the difficulty of accessing essential public services. Moreover, many PwD are compelled to navigate their wheelchairs on busy roads with fast-moving traffic, posing a considerable safety risk to all road users.

State parties shall take measures to:

Ensure the equal right of persons with disabilities to own or inherit property, to control their own financial affairs and to have equal access to bank loans, mortgages and other forms of financial credit, and shall ensure that persons with disabilities are not arbitrarily deprived of their property.

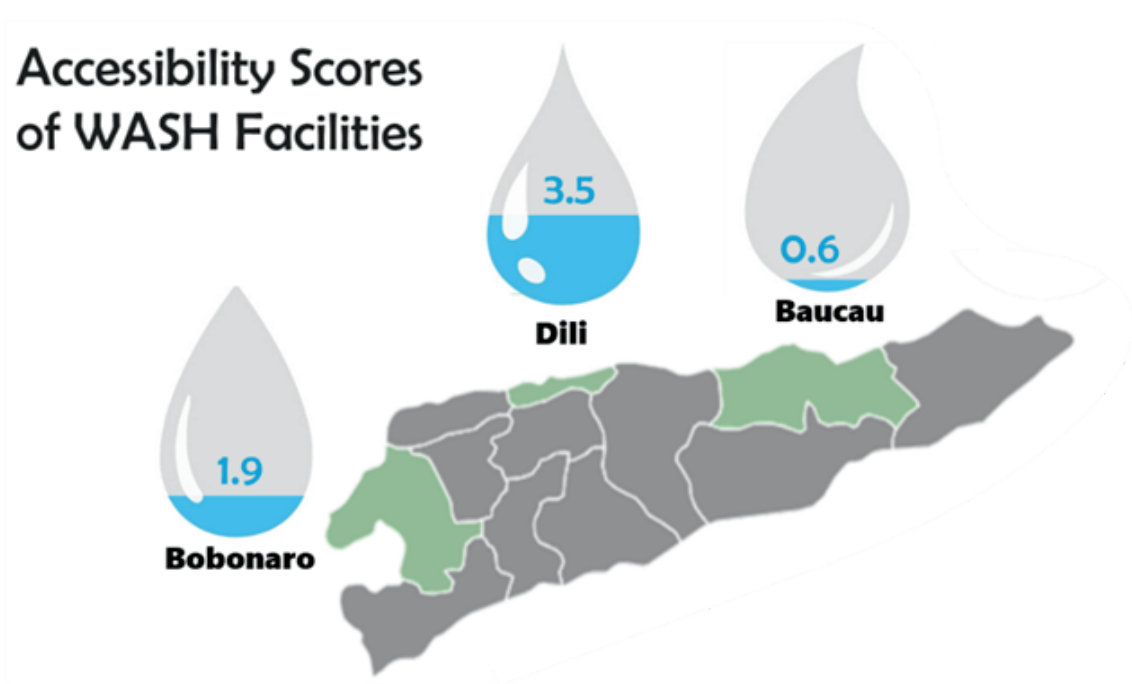
CRPD Article 12

Sidewalks
are not useable ;
roads are scary.

PwD: VISION

Public infrastructure is generally more accessible in the Capital city of Dili compared to other municipalities. With central administration of government being in Dili, initiatives to improve accessibility have taken place in some public buildings, such as the office of the 'Ministry for Social Solidarity and Inclusion' (MSSI) and the 'National Rehabilitation Centre' (NRC). These building were acknowledged by survey respondents to host some basic access-supporting features.

However, the accessibility situation deteriorates in other municipalities, specifically in Bobonaro and Baucau where the research was conducted. In these locations, PwD face challenges in accessing rehabilitation assistance, such as physical therapy and occupational therapy from NCR services. Despite MSSI allocating focal points and establishing branch offices at the municipality level, a significant obstacle for PwD remains the considerable lack of accessible facilities in these offices.



Regional disparities were underscored in the survey findings, with views and experiences varying regarding special accommodations for PwD to access WASH facilities. In Dili, accessibility of public WASH facilities for PwD is considered low, receiving a PA Score of 3.5 out of 10. The situation is worse in Bobonaro and Baucau, with facilities in these municipalities being awarded very low PA Scores of 1.9 and 0.6, respectively. Across the regions surveyed, perceived accessibility of public WASH facilities for PwD is positively associated with the proportion of households having adequate WASH infrastructure.³⁷ Shortcomings in the quality of private household WASH facilities may reflect broader systemic issues that impact public services.

³⁷ Timor-Leste Ministry of Finance and UNICEF (2021) 'Options Paper: Understanding and Measuring Multidimensional Poverty in Timor-Leste', Timor-Leste

Access to suitable public toilets and hygiene infrastructure poses a major challenge for PwD.³⁸ Latrines are often not designed or positioned in a way that makes them useable by all. The lack of accessible public WASH facilities deprives PwD of their basic human rights and exacerbates dependency issues, as they may need to rely on assistance from others when using non-adapted amenities. When PwD lack adequate access to sanitation facilities beyond their homes, it creates additional barriers to their education, employment, and social engagement.

Survey participants were tasked with providing statements explaining their overall choices in response to the questionnaire. Synthesizing these collective responses, the statements highlighted several challenges and sentiments. Key issues identified encompassed the absence of sufficient wheelchair access, handrails, Braille materials, and signage in public spaces and buildings. There was the opinion that the government has not prioritized addressing these issues effectively, as evidenced by insufficient identification of PwD and minimal development of assistance programs for different types of disabilities.

A lack of awareness and understanding among authorities and the general public regarding the needs of PwDs was highlighted, leading to discrimination and inadequate provision of services. A few respondents acknowledged that some efforts have been made, such as limited assistance programs and occasional improvements in certain areas. However, most considered overall accessibility to be far from satisfactory. The statements emphasized the



A group of people having a discussion.
Photo: Joanico Herman Soares Martins/Oxfam

³⁷ Timor-Leste Ministry of Finance and UNICEF (2021) 'Options Paper: Understanding and Measuring Multidimensional Poverty in Timor-Leste', Timor-Leste

significance of comprehensive planning and implementation of accessibility measures. This³⁸ involves actively engaging PwDs in decision-making processes and providing essential resources and training for government officials and the general community. Such initiatives are crucial to guaranteeing inclusivity and equal access to public facilities and services.

Regarding who should be responsible for enhancing accessibility for PwD, there was a widespread expectation for the government to take action in addressing the needs of PwD in Timor-Leste. Many respondents mentioned that collaboration between the government and NGOs, both national and international, is essential for preparing facilities and services accessible to PwD. There was a recurring sentiment that the government should allocate sufficient budgetary resources towards improving accessibility and support services for PwD, with some accentuating the need for prioritization and accountability in this regard. It is evident that there is a collective call for proactive measures from the government and relevant organisations to ensure inclusivity and support for PwDs across various sectors and domains.

In summary, these findings underscore the urgent need for inclusive policies and actions to address obstacles faced by PwD in accessing public infrastructure. Systemic barriers limit participation and opportunities, which perpetuates inequality. Regional disparities show a need for targeted interventions in rural areas. Lack of awareness about different impairments and disability issues among authorities and the public stresses the need for education and advocacy. Addressing these findings requires concerted efforts to enact policy reforms and allocate resources effectively.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION & PROGRESS

PwD in Timor-Leste face numerous barriers to participation in society. The majority of public infrastructure and services in Timor-Leste are not currently accessible to many PwD. Various environmental, institutional, and socioeconomic factors are responsible for this. Despite existing legislation and policies aimed at addressing these challenges, implementation hurdles persist which undermines the effectiveness of initiatives such as the DNAP.

The decade-long gap between the approval of the national policy on PwD and the approval of the national action plan for PwD has contributed to slow progress being made. In 2023, the government reported in their review on the country's SDG contributions that implementation of the DNAP was a key priority. Yet the sentiments of DPOs in 2024 indicate that action is still insufficient and they call for the Government to adequately resource and operationalise the DNAP effectively.

Despite various challenges, the State has accomplished initiatives aimed at supporting and safeguarding PwD. Internal efforts have prioritized enhancing staff understanding of disability issues and rights, promoting the use of non-discriminatory language, and fostering inter-ministerial coordination to enhance program design and implementation. Concrete actions resulting from this awareness-raising process include the appointment of



A woman skillfully translates sign language, fostering inclusive communication with a person with a disability.
Photo: Aderito Do Rosario Da Cunha Mambares/Oxfam

disability ambassadors within each line Ministry, the recruitment of staff with disabilities, and increased collaboration with DPOs. Although accessibility of public infrastructure and services is still critically low for PwD across many domains, some commendable progress has been made.

The office of the Ministry of Youth, Sport, Art & Culture (MYSAC), previously the Secretary State of Youth and Sports (SSYS), is an exemplary showcase of comprehensive efforts to provide accessible accommodations for PwD. Facilities were established in 2022 through a collaboration between SSYS and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. Together, they implemented inclusive accessibility features designed to cater to individuals with various disabilities. From the entrance on the road, guiding blocks have been installed for people with vision impairments—the first of its kind in Timor-Leste. Other access-supporting measures include signage for those with hearing impairments, wheelchair ramps, an elevator, provision of some basic facilities in the conference room, and specialised WASH facilities.^{39,40}

At the MSSl office, there is a notable absence of assisted devices, such as Braille materials, Braille writing instruments, talking software for computers, & guiding sticks & blocks

Key Informant: MSSl

³⁹ Ibid,...op.cit, World Health Organisation (2022) 'Global Report on Health Equity for Persons with Disabilities', Geneva, Switzerland

⁴⁰ Key informant: Ambassador to Persons with Disabilities MEYS, 13 March 2023.

The Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion (MSSI) is the primary governmental body tasked with safeguarding and advancing the rights of PwD. The Ministry leads and supervises the execution of the DNAP by collaborating with DPOs and various other government departments. At their central office in Dili, accessibility measures currently consist of ramps and an elevator. However, the ministry does aim to enhance accessibility in the future and meet universal design standards.⁴¹ Considering the program of work that the MSSI is responsible for, ensuring that their buildings are fully accessible is essential to demonstrate their commitment to inclusivity and set an example for other government agencies.

The Ministry of Public Works (MPW) acknowledges the current inadequacy of accessibility for PwD within the public works sector. Recognizing the imperative to integrate universal design principles from project inception, the MPW aims to prioritize this approach in future infrastructure and utilities development. The MPW is committed to fostering ongoing inter-ministerial coordination to raise awareness among all government institutions and facilitate the implementation of universally designed public infrastructure. This strategy should be integrated into the action plans of each line Ministry and relevant Secretary of States involved in implementing the NAP-PwD 2021-2030. The MPW aims to expand the universal design specifications originally outlined in its Ministerial Dispatch No. 07/MOP/VIII/2020 to incorporate additional standards which accommodate individuals with various impairments. Through collaboration with DPOs, the MPW will actively engage and solicit contributions from them in campaign and socialization processes, thus fostering inclusive decision-making and ensuring the efficacy of access-improvement schemes.

The Ministry of Transport & Communications (MTC) has implemented various initiatives increase accessibility within the transportation and communication sectors. For instance, the National Directorate for Land and Transport in Hera is working to enhance opportunities for driver licensing and vehicle ownership. They have installed an access ramp at their licensing facility and are supporting PwD through modification of vehicles to suit their needs and development of inclusive test conditions; the MTC has implemented Standard Operational Procedure guidelines to strengthen the service system for PwD during driver licence examinations.

Accessibility enhancements have also been made to the Berlin ferry service which provides public transport to Auturo Island and the enclave of Oecusse. Deployment of a mobile platform on the dock allows a level ramp to be used for boarding and disembarking, as opposed to one with a significant incline. This particularly benefits children, seniors, and PwD. A wheelchair-accessible slope adjacent to the passenger walkway further assists individuals with mobility limitations.

⁴¹ Key informants: National Director for the Promotion of Personal Rights of Persons with Disabilities Focal Point of Planning and Program of DNPDPD-MSSI., 21 March 2023.

The MTC intends to develop further access-supporting measures for PwD in Dili. This includes construction of specialised bus stops, inclusive traffic board signage, and installation of audible traffic lights in areas frequently used by PwD, such as the road adjacent to the MSSl building, outside the premises disability organisations (e.g., the Association of Disabilities in Timor-Leste), and in the vicinity of the Government Palace.⁴² While some of these MTC initiatives are already underway, ongoing efforts and coordination are needed to establish suitable public transport conditions for PwD.

Towards inclusive public transport, a ‘Transport Sector Master Plan’ was launched in 2018 which partly set out to provide a safe transport system that meets modern environmental standards and that considers the interests of the socially or economically disadvantaged. However, PwD were not specifically recognised in the policy. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the MTC have been working since 2022 to develop a ‘Public Transport Project’ (PTP) for Timor-Leste. Technical assistance and scoping funds were provided by the ADB to evaluate the existing public transportation system, create designs for new bus terminals, and formulate a draft PTP Master Plan—envisioned to be submitted for approval in 2024. An initial poverty and social analysis emphasized the PTPs commitment to poverty reduction and social inclusion, pinpointing the significance of catering to the needs of PwD to improve their freedom of movement. The \$45 million USD project intends to construct bus terminals with comfortable waiting areas and passenger amenities, provide clear routes and scheduled services, maintain roadworthy vehicles, ensure proximity of terminals, integrate child-caring facilities, and install accessibility features to support PwD.

Progress in the field of communication and technology has also been made. The Secretary of State for Communication (SSCOM) has implemented inclusive communication programmes through national television channels, such as the incorporation of sign language into news broadcasts. Websites in Timor-Leste are however mostly not designed with accommodations to support their use by people with visual impairments. According to the SSCOM, improvements are underway with some websites being adapted with audio features and special text formatting.

State parties shall take measures to:

Promote other appropriate forms of assistance and support to persons with disabilities to ensure their access to information, and promote access for persons with disabilities to new information and communications technologies and systems, including the Internet

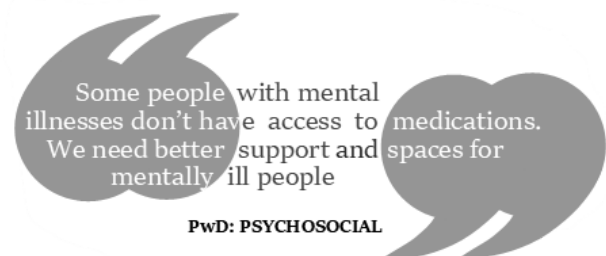
CRPD Article 9

⁴² Key informant: Head of Planning MTC / Head of the Gender Work and Social Inclusion Section, 21 March 2023

The Ministry of Education (MoE) oversaw development of the 'Inclusive Education Policy' through its national inclusivity programme. However, despite being implemented in 2017, many schools are still not physically accessible to children with mobility difficulties as they lack ramps, special WASH facilities, and other measures. Schools in Timor-Leste have little capacity to cater for the diverse needs of children with hearing, vision, or learning difficulties; obstacles include lack of available assistive devices, limited specialised training of teachers, and inadequate funding. There is an urgent need for increased budgetary investment to fully realize the inclusive education policy, and create educational environments which are accessible, non-discriminatory, and supportive. Whilst ensuring that all schools have basic accommodations for youth with various disabilities is important, opportunity to develop smaller specialised schools in areas with higher prevalences of disabled youth should be considered.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has coordinated with MSSl to offer technical assistance to mental healthcare centres. This has been extended to support NGOs which advocate for and provide rehabilitation assistance to individuals with mental health conditions. The government has established some public facilities to support individuals with psychosocial disabilities. One notable facility is the Saint John of God⁴³ Rehabilitation Centre,⁴⁴ situated in the Laklubar administrative post of the Manatuto municipality. Furthermore, NGOs such as PRADET, located in the capital city of Dili, provide essential services including mental health counseling and assistance in procuring medical equipment for individuals with psychosocial disabilities.

Although there are some existing services for individuals with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities, most public infrastructure remains largely inaccessible to this group. The local organization Alma Sister, established by the Catholic congregation, focuses on providing therapy services exclusively to children with intellectual disabilities. However, the majority of personal assistance and medical treatment for this demographic are facilitated by NGOs actively engaged in these critical areas.



State parties shall take measures to:

Provide forms of live assistance and intermediaries, including guides, readers and professional sign language interpreters, to facilitate accessibility to buildings and other facilities open to the public

CRPD Article 9

The findings of this study's survey indicates that targeted accessibility measures to support individuals with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities are limited if not present at all. These categories of disability are generally least understood by members of the public as they are not always visible and

⁴³ Key informant: National Director for the Promotion of the right of disability staff local points plan and programme. DNPDPD-MSSI., 21 March 2023.

⁴⁴ Private Institutions, as the National Center for Mental Health Rehabilitation The main activities are: Mental Health Treatment (hospitalised for three months) which is subject to the Ministry of Health.

are highly varied. Because of this, establishing accommodations for them is not as straightforward as for other impairments. However, universal design considerations have been devised in other countries, such as providing on-site support by specially trained staff, designing services that are simple to navigate, and reducing crowding and wait times. Key essential public facilities ideally should have live assistance available to facilitate access for different PwD.

The incumbent IXth Constitutional Government of Timor-Leste is actively working to foster a more inclusive society for PwD. Since assuming office in July 2023, notable achievements include the establishment of the long-awaited 'National Council for People with Disabilities' to support implementation of the NPIP-PwD and associated DNAP. They have also conducted an audit of the NRC, resulting in its restructure. MSSl participated in the 'ASEAN High-Level Forum on Partnerships and Inclusive Development for PwD by 2025', emphasizing Timor-Leste's commitment to regional efforts aimed at ensuring equal access to services and opportunities for PwD. Commencing in



early 2024, sensitization programs across 13 municipalities of Timor-Leste have been initiated to combat discrimination against PwD, raise awareness about their rights, and promote civic engagement in discussions on disability policy. Additionally, the Council of Ministers recently approved a draft Decree-Law to increase monthly social pensions for the disabled and elderly to \$60–100 USD, dependent on age.⁴⁵ Furthermore, a new online 'Social Security Portal' was launched to enhance access for PwD to vital information regarding social security policies, benefits, applications, budgets, institutions, contacts, and national statistics.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Decree Law 53/2022 July 20.

⁴⁶ Portal da Segunda Social, available online from: <https://segurancasocial.gov.tl/>.



Oxfam in Timor-Leste Country Director Fausto Belo Ximenes delivers opening remarks at the Mapping Power and Stakeholder Analysis Workshop
Photo: Aderito Do Rosario Da Cunha Mambares/Oxfam

In summary, the State of Timor-Leste has implemented various programs to support PwD. Efforts include developing inclusive policy, strengthening capacities of civil servants, and collaborating with DPOs. Although widespread infrastructure accessibility is still low, progress is seen, especially in key ministries. However, challenges persist; particularly in the education, health, and transport sectors which require increased investment and policy implementation. Initiatives such as the recent formation of the 'National Council for Persons with Disabilities' and plans to integrate universal design standards into legislation demonstrate a continued commitment to addressing these issues.



A woman presenting to a group of people.
Photo: Aderito Do Rosario Da Cunha Mambares/Oxfam

CHALLENGES

Several barriers hamper Timor-Leste's ability to swiftly and effectively execute the 'Disability National Action Plan 2021–2030' and fulfill its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The CRPD sets high ideals, however practical implementation is difficult. Real-world challenges and varying cultural contexts can hinder the treaty's impact. Bridging the gap between ideals and implementation requires ongoing efforts from advocates and policymakers. This study illuminates several contributing factors that exacerbate these challenges, including:

- CRPD compliance in Timor-Leste faces significant institutional barriers, including ineffective coordination between line Ministries and Secretariates of State, inadequate funding, and poor budgeting aligned with the DNAP. This has resulted in some government departments failing to sufficiently incorporate the needs of PwD during the planning and design of public infrastructure.
- The CRPD calls for the development, promulgation, and monitoring of minimum standards and guidelines for infrastructure open to the public, in accordance with principals of universal design. However, there are no agreed upon models or methods to evaluate how universal design is applied or what outcomes are achieved. Timor-Leste first must adopt, adapt, or develop such standards based on best practices of other nations.
- The CRPD defines 'reasonable accommodation' as a necessary and appropriate adjustment, not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, required in specific cases to ensure PwD enjoy or exercise, on an equal basis with others, all human rights and fundamental freedoms. However, the vagueness and subjectivity surrounding what constitutes reasonable accommodation must be clarified before policies can be enacted.
- The CRPD requires State parties to provide training for stakeholders on accessibility issues. This is an area which requires focused attention; beneficiaries should include public officials, service providers, private sector employers, educators, health professionals, architects, engineers, and media professionals, among others, to be significantly effective. Progress has been made in this area, but concerted efforts are still required.



- Limited access to information in Timor-Leste obstructs the dissemination of essential details about disabilities, public policy, and government programs for PwD. Although social security is available for families impacted by disability, obtaining it involves meeting specific criteria. Families must possess valid identification cards and undergo health and social assessments by the MoH and MSSl. However, navigating this process is complex and challenging. Many families with PwD are unaware of the disability subsidy, which leads to missed opportunities for financial assistance.
- Limited baseline data on actual accessibility of public infrastructure throughout Timor-Leste makes identification of buildings and spaces which need attention difficult, and hampers the evaluation of government programs and policies addressing accessibility concerns. Data on PwD is unreliable—obtaining accurate and disaggregated data is crucial for implementation of policy and planning of programs. Identification of individuals with psychosocial and intellectual impairment is also particularly challenging; the version of the WGQ survey currently being used during national censuses does not assess these disabilities.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- The IXth Constitutional Government of Timor-Leste is tasked with aligning all policy and legislation with the mandates outlined in the 'Convention on the Rights for Persons with Disability' (CRPD). This alignment serves as a cornerstone for the effective implementation of all obligations assumed as a State party to the convention, and is integral to the steadfast goals of the 'Disability National Action Plan 2021–2032'. It is imperative that the Government develops policies and guidelines tailored to comprehensively address the diverse needs of PwD.
- ·Revise the 'National Policy on Inclusion and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities'. Ensure that its principles, objectives, and language are guided by the CRPD. Strengthen its scope and quality of commitment to core concepts of human rights. Identify intersections between disability and other vulnerabilities to enhance inclusivity and broaden the policy's protective measures. Commit to periodic revision based on input from DPOs to ensure ongoing relevance and effectiveness.
- The Government should revise the 'National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030' by incorporating the latest information from the 2022 National Census. This update is important for setting nationwide goals and targets for PwD across all Ministries and Secretariates of State. Revision will enable the development of more impactful legislation and policy, and facilitate adequate allocation of funds to address challenges faced by PwD.
- The Government should establish a formal policy and mechanism for appointing 'Disability Abassadors' to support and represent each Ministry and Secretary of State. Ambassadors must be equipped with the requisite knowledge and skills to conduct detailed cost analyses for the requirements of PwD, and be able to actively engage in the annual budgeting process.
- ·The Ministry of Public Works emphasizes the need for universal design standards to be applied to new and existing public infrastructure. However, its current focus is limited to addressing the needs of individuals with mobility-based impairment only. Furthermore, its non-legally binding dispatch lacks accountability. The directive must be advanced through the enactment of new legislation to broaden its scope of implementation and strengthen enforcability. This expansion will pave the way for development of infrastructure capable of accommodating PwD with different needs. Socialisation of universal design standards must be extended to the private sector to facilitate architects, engineers, and construction workers in applying them to the design and refurbishment of commercial buildings open to the public.



- The previous government took a commendable step forward by introducing American Sign Language translation to national television broadcasts. However, individuals with hearing impairments still encounter obstacles due to the absence of a nationally recognized and adapted sign language in Timor-Leste. To address this, the current Government should initiate the introduction and teaching of a standardized sign language to PwD and selected civil servants.
- The Government must prioritize the establishment of robust partnerships with DPOs to significantly enhance the accessibility of all public infrastructure. By engaging with DPOs, the Government can leverage their unique perspectives and expertise to seamlessly integrate accessibility measures into public buildings and spaces. Additionally, empowering DPOs to monitor the implementation of accessibility programs will ensure accountability and effectiveness. To maximize impact, this collaborative effort should extend to sub-national levels, ensuring comprehensive coverage and implementation.



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Engaging in a thoughtful discussion, two women and a man collaborate to share ideas and insights.
Photo: Aderito Do Rosario Da Cunha Mambares/Oxfam

