

International Democracy Hub – Stakeholder Report

I. Background

1. This report has been submitted by the International Democracy Hub (IDH), a civil society organization based in the Republic of Korea, for consideration by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in its review of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The report presents an overview of legal, policy, and practical developments concerning the rights of persons with disabilities in the DPRK, drawing on information collected and analyzed by IDH since the previous reporting cycle. The report reflects IDH's engagement with disability rights monitoring and aims to contribute to the effective implementation of the CRPD in the DPRK by highlighting key gaps and challenges, particularly in relation to marginalized and underserved disability groups.

II. Information Provided by the International Democracy Hub

A. Legislation

2. The DPRK enacted the *Law on the Protection of Persons with Disabilities* in 2003, explicitly stipulating protections for the rights and interests of persons with disabilities. This law was revised in November 2013² and further strengthened by the adoption of the *Law on the Guarantee of Rights for Persons with Disabilities* in September 2023, indicating ongoing legislative efforts.³
3. However, the DPRK Constitution currently lacks explicit provisions prohibiting discrimination based on disability or guaranteeing equality for persons with disabilities. This absence limits the legal foundation for full inclusion and protection in line with international standards such as the CRPD.⁴
4. The *Socialist Labor Law* includes provisions to support workers temporarily disabled due to workplace accidents or illnesses. Nevertheless, testimonies reveal discrepancies between these legal provisions and their actual implementation, raising concerns about the law's effectiveness in practice.⁵
5. Existing legislation concerning employment lacks specific clauses prohibiting discrimination based on disability. Reasonable accommodations are minimal, often limited to reduced working hours, without broader legal guarantees for equal opportunities in hiring, training, promotion, or dismissal.⁶

6. In the area of family life, while the DPRK asserts that it legally protects the rights of persons with disabilities, practices such as forced sterilization, family separation, and social isolation continue to be reported. Such practices raise serious concerns regarding the protection of personal integrity and family rights.⁷
7. Educational legislation remains narrowly focused on children with visual and hearing impairments. There is little to no legal coverage for inclusive education for children with mental or multiple disabilities, limiting access to appropriate learning environments.⁸
8. Despite constitutional guarantees of freedom of movement, reports indicate that persons with disabilities in the DPRK experience limited freedom in choosing their living environment due to a lack of accessible infrastructure and restricted housing options. Such limitations highlight a gap between legal guarantees and actual enforcement. Such limitations highlight a gap between legal guarantees and actual enforcement.⁹

B. Policies and Strategies

9. Although the DPRK has adopted Regulations on Schools for the Blind and Deaf, the number of special schools—approximately 11 nationwide¹⁰—remains insufficient to ensure broad access to quality education for children with disabilities.¹¹
10. The DPRK’s National Strategy for Economic Development (2016–2020) included targets related to persons with disabilities; however, these objectives have not been effectively met, indicating a gap between strategic planning and practical implementation.¹²
11. While the DPRK has enacted the *Child Rights Protection Law* aiming to guarantee children’s rights, its implementation has been insufficient in effectively safeguarding those rights, particularly in vulnerable and marginalized populations.¹³
12. The DPRK lacks clear legal definitions and comprehensive legislation to prevent child trafficking. Existing measures are insufficient, with no effective investigation or victim protection systems in place, and limited enforcement capacity. Serious concerns remain regarding the effectiveness of the child protection mechanism.¹⁴
13. The birth registration system in the DPRK remains inadequate, with gaps in coverage that contribute to risks of statelessness and restricted access to essential public services for unregistered children.¹⁵
14. Although the DPRK Constitution guarantees freedom of movement, existing policies do not adequately prevent the involvement of children in armed conflict. Relevant international instruments such as the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict have yet to be fully integrated into domestic policy frameworks.¹⁶

15. While some policy frameworks exist to support children and persons with disabilities, their implementation is often geographically limited—primarily concentrated in Pyongyang—resulting in unequal access to services and protection in other regions, particularly remote areas.¹⁷

C. Practical Implementation

16. Although the DPRK has enacted legal and policy frameworks concerning the rights of persons with disabilities, their implementation remains inconsistent and limited in practice. The gap between legislation and enforcement is significant, particularly outside major urban centers.
17. Access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and employment for persons with disabilities is restricted. Reasonable accommodations are rarely available, and inclusive services are underdeveloped, especially for persons with intellectual or multiple disabilities.
18. The limited number of special education institutions—primarily serving individuals with visual or hearing impairments—means that many children with disabilities, particularly those with developmental or complex needs, remain excluded from education.¹⁸
19. Rural and remote areas face severe service gaps, with little to no infrastructure or support systems for persons with disabilities. Most policy implementation is concentrated in Pyongyang, exacerbating regional inequality.¹⁹
20. Discriminatory practices persist in various sectors, including employment, where persons with disabilities face limited opportunities and lack of protection from workplace discrimination.²⁰
21. Testimonies suggest the existence of harmful practices such as forced sterilization and the separation of persons with disabilities from their families, justified by outdated notions of “disability prevention.” These practices contravene international human rights norms.²¹
22. The right to freedom of movement for persons with disabilities is not effectively upheld. In some cases, individuals with disabilities face restrictions on residence or are forcibly relocated away from Pyongyang, further isolating them from access to services.²²
23. While some model institutions exist in Pyongyang, they are not representative of the nationwide reality. Implementation across the country is fragmented, under-monitored, and often inaccessible to marginalized groups, particularly those in non-elite or rural communities.²³

D. Budget

24. The DPRK has not publicly disclosed a dedicated budget for the implementation of the rights of persons with disabilities, making it difficult to assess the scale and sufficiency of financial commitments to disability-related policies and services.²⁴
25. Available information indicates that public investment in disability-inclusive infrastructure—such as accessible transportation, assistive devices, or community-based services—is extremely limited and largely confined to symbolic facilities concentrated in Pyongyang.²⁵
26. Budgetary allocations for special education remain inadequate, as evidenced by the limited number of special schools and the near-total absence of inclusive education programs for children with mental or multiple disabilities.²⁶
27. Rehabilitation and healthcare services for persons with disabilities are underfunded, particularly outside of the capital. This results in unequal access to essential medical care, rehabilitation, and assistive technology across different regions.²⁷
28. There is little to no publicly available data on how national or local budgets are allocated for disability-specific programs, reflecting a broader lack of transparency and accountability in public financial management.²⁸
29. International support and humanitarian aid for disability-related services appear to be minimal and are not systematically integrated into national planning or budgeting frameworks. This hinders long-term sustainability of services for persons with disabilities.²⁹
30. The absence of gender- and disability-sensitive budgeting practices further limits the DPRK’s ability to meet its obligations under the CRPD, particularly with respect to women and children with disabilities who often face multiple layers of marginalization.³⁰

E. Disaggregated data

31. Although the DPRK has established systems for disability registration and data management, it has not released any credible national data disaggregated by disability type,

age, gender, location, or socioeconomic status. Such data has also not been independently verified.³¹

32. Official statistics concerning children with disabilities are extremely limited.³² For example, while some reports mention the existence of approximately 11 special schools nationwide, no data is available on how many children with disabilities are enrolled, their types of disabilities, or regional disparities in access to education.³³
33. The absence of disaggregated data hinders effective monitoring of the implementation of the CRPD and other human rights frameworks. Without detailed information, it is difficult to assess whether marginalized groups—such as women with disabilities, children in rural areas, or individuals with multiple disabilities—are being adequately protected.³⁴
34. There is no disaggregated budgetary information that would allow civil society or international actors to track government spending on disability-related programs or services.³⁵
35. International organizations and UN bodies have repeatedly called for improved data collection and reporting practices in the DPRK, but national authorities have yet to establish a consistent system for collecting and sharing rights-based, disaggregated disability data.³⁶
36. The lack of transparent, disaggregated data—along with the concentration of data collection in specific regions—not only impedes policy formulation and evaluation, but also limits opportunities for targeted interventions, inclusive planning, and accountability.³⁷

F. Main recommendations

a. Legal and Constitutional Reform

37. To address the absence of constitutional provisions prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability, IDH recommends that the DPRK amend its Constitution to explicitly prohibit disability-based discrimination and to guarantee the right to equality in accordance with the CRPD.³⁸
38. To address the lack of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation protecting persons with disabilities, IDH recommends the adoption of a national law that explicitly prohibits discrimination in all areas of life—including employment, education, healthcare, and access to services—and mandates the provision of reasonable accommodation.

39. To address the ineffective enforcement of existing disability-related legislation, IDH recommends the establishment of independent monitoring mechanisms and clear enforcement procedures to ensure the effective implementation of disability rights laws.

b. Access to Services and Protection

40. To address the severe limitations in educational access for children with intellectual and multiple disabilities, IDH recommends the nationwide expansion of inclusive and special education services that respond to the full spectrum of disabilities, including in rural and underserved regions.

41. To address the continuation of harmful practices such as forced sterilization and family separation under the pretext of disability prevention, IDH recommends the immediate abolition of such practices and the revision of relevant laws to align with the CRPD's principles of dignity, autonomy, and family integrity.

42. To address disparities in access to healthcare, rehabilitation, and assistive devices for persons with disabilities, IDH recommends sustained investment in disability-inclusive health infrastructure and services, particularly outside of Pyongyang.

43. To address ongoing restrictions on the freedom of movement and forced relocation of persons with disabilities, IDH recommends that the DPRK uphold the right to freedom of movement for all persons with disabilities and abolish any discriminatory relocation policies.

c. Budget and Resource Allocation

44. To address the insufficient and opaque allocation of budgetary resources for disability-related programs, IDH recommends that the DPRK allocate adequate, transparent, and disaggregated budget lines to ensure the effective implementation of disability rights in all sectors.

d. Data and Accountability

45. To address the absence of reliable disaggregated data on persons with disabilities, IDH recommends the establishment of a national data collection system that provides regular, disaggregated statistics by disability type, gender, age, and location to inform evidence-based policymaking and monitoring.

e. International Cooperation

46. To address the lack of alignment with international human rights standards in disability policy implementation, IDH recommends that the DPRK strengthen cooperation with UN mechanisms and international organizations to obtain technical assistance and build institutional capacity for CRPD compliance.

Notes:

² A/HRC/37/56/Add.1: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities on her visit to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, 08 December, 2017, <https://docs.un.org/e/A/HRC/37/56/Add.1>

³ Hanbyun & PSCORE: Democratic People's Republic of Korea – Submission to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review, 34th Session of the UPR Working Group, <https://uprdoc.ohchr.org/uprweb/downloadfile.aspx?filename=13171&file=EnglishTranslation>

⁴ CRPD/C/PRK/RQ/1: Replies of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the list of issues in relation to its initial report, 18 March, 2024, <https://docs.un.org/en/CRPD/C/PRK/RQ/1>

⁵ FIDH & NKDB: Submission to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), 22 July, 2022 https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/crpd_-_fidh_nkdb_submission_dprk.pdf

⁶ North Korea's Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act System and Tasks: SDGs 10. Support Measures to Ensure the Rights and Roles of the Masses as a State Entity, North Korean Law Studies, vol. 27, 2022, pp. 63–114. <https://www.kci.go.kr/kciportal/ci/sereArticleSearch/ciSereArtiView.kci?sereArticleSearchBean.artiId=ART002861693>

⁷ Ministry of Unification, 2023 Report on North Korean Human Rights, <https://www.unikorea.go.kr/unikorea/business/nkhr/NKHRCenter/archive/>

⁸ Disability, Repressive Regimes, and Health Disparity: Assessing Country Conditions in North Korea, University of Baltimore School of Law, Faculty Scholarship, 2014, https://scholarworks.law.ubalt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1013&context=fac_articles

⁹ Social Awareness and Discrimination Revealed in the Lives of the Disabled in North Korea, *Unification and Peace*, volume 13, no. 2, 2021, pp. 323–373. <https://www.kci.go.kr/kciportal/ci/sereArticleSearch/ciSereArtiView.kci?sereArticleSearchBean.artiId=ART002803440>

¹⁰ OHCHR, 21 July 2022, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/TBSearch.aspx?Lang=En&CountryID=47

¹¹ The Experiences and Perceptions of North Korean Defectors and Experts Regarding the Education of Children with Disabilities in North Korea,” Korean Journal of Special Education for Children with Disabilities, vol. 25, no. 4, 2023, pp. 45–74, <https://www.kci.go.kr/kciportal/ci/sereArticleSearch/ciSereArtiView.kci?sereArticleSearchBean.artiId=ART003025779>

¹² Evaluation and Analysis of the DPRK's Initial Report on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Korea Institute for National Unification, Online Series CO 19-03, 29 January 2019, [https://repo.kinu.or.kr/bitstream/2015.oak/9925/1/CO19-03\(e\).pdf](https://repo.kinu.or.kr/bitstream/2015.oak/9925/1/CO19-03(e).pdf)

¹³ UNICEF, Annual Report for 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/dprk/media/461/file/UNICEF%20DPR>

¹⁴ UNHCR, 2017 Trafficking in Persons Report - Democratic People's Republic of Korea, <https://www.refworld.org/reference/annualreport/usdos/2017/en/117316>

¹⁵ Hearing on North Korean Refugees and the Imminent Danger of Forced Repatriation from China, 13 June 2023, Washington D.C. https://chrissmith.house.gov/uploadedfiles/ethan_shin_testimony.pdf

¹⁶ KINU, Blind Spots of Human Rights and Peace: North Korean Children's Involvement in Military Activities, https://www.kinu.or.kr/eng/module/report/view.do?idx=125339&nav_code=eng1674805982

¹⁷ A/HRC/37/56/Add.1, OHCHR, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities on her visit to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Disability/A.HRC.37.56.Add.1_easytoread.pdf

¹⁸ N. Hamgyong Province moves to improve education accessibility for disabled children, May 10, 2023, <https://www.dailynk.com/english/north-hamgyong-province-moves-improve-accessibility-education-disabled-children/>

¹⁹ Human Rights in DPRK Conferences, 19 March 2025, <https://www.unognewsroom.org/story/en/2585/hrc58-human-rights-in-dprk-19-march-2025>

²⁰ N. Korea touts disabilities education policy amid rights abuse criticism, May 03, 2024, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20240503001100315>

²¹ 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: North Korea Section 06, https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/north-korea/#report-toc_section-6_subsection-7

²² Freedom House, FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2024 : North Korea – F4, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/north-korea/freedom-world/2024#PR>

²³ Disability in N. Korea: Stigma persists despite official efforts, July 9, 2024, <https://www.dailynk.com/english/disability-in-n-korea-stigma-persists-despite-official-efforts/>

²⁴ Human Rights Conditions for Persons with Disabilities in North Korea, September 6, 2024, <https://www.nkhiddengulag.org/blog/human-rights-conditions-for-persons-with-disabilities-in-north-korea>

²⁵ N.K. lacks accessible infrastructure for disabled persons: expert, January 31, 2018, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20180131006200315>

- ²⁶ A Human Rights Challenge in Access to Education in North Korea: Contradiction Between Laws and Reality, March 22, 2024, <https://www.dailyink.com/english/a-human-rights-challenge-in-access-to-education-in-north-korea-contradiction-between-laws-and-reality/>
- ²⁷ The Reality of Disability Rights in North Korea, December 17, 2024, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2024/12/17/the-reality-of-disability-rights-in-north-korea/>
- ²⁸ APARC People with Disabilities in a Changing North Korea, https://fsi-live.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/Zellweger_Disabilities_DPRK_web.pdf
- ²⁹ Global Disability Inclusion Report : Accelerating Disability Inclusion in a Changing and Diverse World, 2025, https://www.globaldisabilitysummit.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/GIP03351-UNICEF-GDIR-Full-report_Proof-4.pdf
- ³⁰ Gender- and disability-inclusive budgeting: Issues and policy options, 2023, <https://knowledge.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/12/issue-paper-gender-and-disability-inclusive-budgeting-issues-and-policy-options>
- ³¹ APARC The WALTER H.SHORENSTEIN ASIA-PACIFIC Research Center, People with Disabilities in a Changing North Korea, Katharina Zellweger https://fsi-live.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/Zellweger_Disabilities_DPRK_web.pdf
- ³² UN Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, DPPK-Project_ACC-464. <https://unprpd.org/new/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/DPRK-Project-ACC-464.docx>
- ³³ UN OHCHR Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) – Article 23: Children with Disabilities Article 23 (CRC) states: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>
- ³⁴ CRPD/C/PRK/1 Initial Report of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, December, Juche 107(2018). https://www.unikorea.go.kr/board/file/bbs_000000000000011/53928/FILE_00000000020145/2019060717243940045;jsessionid=hoX4x5EG3U64-jyb8oHCwzdg.unikorea21
- ³⁵ White paper on human rights in North Korea, 2018. https://www.kinu.or.kr/eng/module/report/view.do?idx=113745&nav_code=eng1674806000
- ³⁶ A/HRC/42/10 Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, 25 June, 2019. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/kp-index>
- ³⁷ HRNK Report, The Shackled Wave: North Korea’s Enigmatic Interplay with Asian Ascendancy and Hallyu, 8 May, 2025. <https://www.nkhiddengulag.org/blog/the-shackled-wave-north-koreas-enigmatic-interplay-with-asian-ascendancy-and-hallyu>