

Making services accessible: a case study from Bangladesh



The National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh (NHRCB) has issued a number of advisories to government departments to improve disabled people's access to a range of different services.

Working closely with government as well as civil society partners, the NHRCB's work has focused on healthcare provision, accessible information, supporting the needs of disabled children and accessibility in public spaces.

Why the NHRCB undertook this work

Since being founded in 2009, the NHRCB has had a Thematic Committee on Persons with Disability and Autism in place to advise and make decisions on all matters relating to the human rights of disabled people. The Committee includes four members with lived experience of disability.

The Committee noted that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was particularly severe on disabled people across many different areas of life. The NHRCB has used its powers to advise government departments and enter into formal agreements with other bodies aimed at reducing the negative impact of the pandemic on disabled people, and supporting inclusion through the recovery.

The result

Prioritising disabled people's needs through COVID-19

To progress disabled people's right to health, the NHRCB recommended that the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare must prioritise disabled people's access to COVID-19 testing, vaccination and PPE. The Ministry committed to this during the peak of the pandemic and also ensured timely welfare payments to provide financial support.

To support the needs of disabled and autistic children throughout lockdown, the NHRCB advocated for inclusive television programming that supported both learning and entertainment while children were not permitted to be in school.

Accessible communications

The NHRCB is also continuing to work with government to improve digital accessibility and protect the rights of those with visual impairments. A change to copyright law in Bangladesh is currently in progress after the NHRCB urged government to ratify the Marrakesh Treaty, which facilitates the production of specially-adapted books for people with blindness or visual impairments without complicated legal process.

Internally, the NHRCB is planning to launch a Digital Complaints Management System and Online Human Rights Course for students with accessibility a priority.

To support the needs of disabled people who cannot write by hand through public processes and examinations, the NHRCB has called for a unified, integrated guideline on using scribes.

Accessibility in public places

To protect the right to accessibility in all public places, public transports and services, the NHRCB is continuing advocacy with the government. It is also conducting research work on situational analysis of accessibility of people with disability.

The NHRCB has recommended to include information about disability in all types of training programs for all levels of government officials.

