



Rehabilitation International

News!

A GLOBAL ADVOCATE FOR REHABILITATION, INCLUSION AND HUMAN RIGHTS



Editorial

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

Welcome to the May 2025 edition of the Rehabilitation International Newsletter.

This issue brings you key highlights from across our global network:

- ◆ Inside RI: Launching the RI Youth Forum — empowering the next generation of disability rights advocates.
- ◆ Life Lesson: A Dream That Doesn't Sit Still — an inspiring glimpse into the life of a student with a disability.
- ◆ Science Corner:
 - Designing Cities for Youth Mental Health: A fresh perspective on inclusive urban planning.
 - Leprosy, Disability, and Social Exclusion: A new study reveals the persistent barriers to participation.
- ◆ Announcement: RI call for application to host the 25th RI World Congress in 2028

We warmly invite your contributions and stories — your voice is vital in advancing our shared mission of inclusion and dignity for all. Thank you to all our contributors and readers for your continued support. Together, we build a more inclusive world.

Warm regards,
Hannover, May 2025
RI President & RI Media

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Rehabilitation International invites young people with disabilities to join its Youth Forum - 1



The life situation of young people with disabilities differs significantly from those of adults and elderly people. This concerns, for example, questions about a person's own identity, the decisions about choice of a profession and career planning, finding a partner and planning a family. Furthermore, attitudes of peers and friends as well as communication practices differ a lot. Social media seem to dominate as source of information and setting societal norms including aspects of beauty, behavior and opinions. On the other hand, the use of modern technology, including information technology and artificial intelligence as well as the progress of barrier-free environments imply opportunities that have not been available before.

What does all this mean for young people with disabilities? This question must be answered by young people themselves. This is the main reasons why the Executive Committee of Rehabilitation decided to provide a forum to young people with disabilities for communication, analyzing the situation, developing solutions where needed and to develop policies and strategies to improve life situation of young people with disabilities and to shape future opportunities. A Youth Forum within an international organization also includes an opportunity to communicate with peers all around the globe and furthermore to profit from RI's networks and the exchange with a generation of experienced leaders in the field of rehabilitation, inclusion and human rights policies.

The perspective of young people with disabilities are related to RI's activities and policy goals in many ways.

Just a few examples:

- Rehabilitation International is advocating for disability-inclusive education: to learn from those who are experiencing different types of education is most important to develop good practices;
- Rehabilitation International is advocating for disability-inclusive universities and job trainings. Young people with disabilities know much better what the needs of students are and what kind of job young people with disabilities aim to be trained for;
- Rehabilitation International advocates for qualified rehabilitation for every person in need. It is obvious that rehabilitation programs for young people must be designed differently from those for adults and elderly people. If only the seniors decide on rehabilitation programs, they will never meet the needs of young people;
- Rehabilitation International advocates for disability inclusive societies. But what does this mean in relation to societal attitudes and norms and, in particular, for communication in social media. Only young people know what kind of problems are present and how to influence attitudes of the young generation;
- Rehabilitation international advocates for accessible and/or special forms of sports and leisure activities. Both are important aspects of life and must be shaped according to young person's needs and wishes;
- Rehabilitation International advocates for barrier-free access to labor and employment. What does this mean for young people just entering professional life and what are important prerequisites to have a start into the job equally with others.

Of course, many other points could be added here.

It is of great strategic relevance to include the perspectives of young people with disabilities into all areas of RI's work.

Rehabilitation International invites young people with disabilities to join its Youth Forum - 2



On the one hand it will help RI to learn from young people with regard to societal and political developments, to shape its positions including the expectations of young people, to avoid working in an “old guys” bubble. The RI Youth Forum will be an inspiration and an engine to move forward. On the other hand, being part of RI will be a great opportunity for young people to involve in political and advocacy activities at an international level and in particular to be involved on decision making at the level of the United Nations and its agencies like UNESCO, WHO, ILO and others. Last but not least it is clear that the leaders of tomorrow are at present young people.

It is of great strategic relevance to include the perspectives of young people with disabilities into all areas of RI's work. On the one hand it will help RI to learn from young people with regard to societal and political developments, to shape its positions including the expectations of young people, to avoid working in an “old guys” bubble. The RI Youth Forum will be an inspiration and an engine to move forward. On the other hand, being part of RI will be a great opportunity for young people to involve in political and advocacy activities at an international level and in particular to be involved on decision making at the level of the United Nations and its agencies like UNESCO, WHO, ILO and others. Last but not least it is clear that the leaders of tomorrow are at present young people.

Rehabilitation International invites young people with disabilities to join the RI Youth Forum. An active Youth Forum will be very important for all young person with disability worldwide. It will become a forum for young people with disabilities to communicate with peers all around the globe and it will be an opportunity to shape international policies for a better future of all persons with disabilities.

[Terms of Reference RI Youth Forum can be found here: https://shorturl.at/OyrYA](https://shorturl.at/OyrYA)

May 2025



Prof. Christoph Gutenbrunner
MD, PhD, FRCP, SFEBPRM
RI President

A Dream That Doesn't Sit Still: Life as a Student with Disability - 1



“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” – Nelson Mandela.

That quote from Mandela echoes in my mind each time I wheel myself into the lecture hall. For me, education is not just a pursuit of credentials or academic routine. It is, quite simply, a revolution — one that begins within.

My name is Arvan Setiawan. I'm a graduate student (Master degree program) in Public Policy at Airlangga University in Surabaya, Indonesia. I live with a physical disability and use a wheelchair daily. But let me clarify: this is not a story of tragedy. Disability is not a limitation of dreams, nor an excuse to stop moving forward. My dreams do not sit still — they roll with me, slowly but persistently.

The Classroom of Life

My decision to return to university wasn't driven by ambition or societal pressure. It stemmed from a deeply personal desire: to be a better version of myself. For some, higher education is a gateway to status or career. For me, it's both a spiritual and intellectual pilgrimage — an act of becoming.

Education fills my life with meaning. It helps me understand the intricacies of society and the world around me. I don't just want to succeed — I want to grow, to know, and to contribute. Knowledge is not just power; it is purpose.

I am blessed with a support system that includes my mother, whose quiet strength is my compass, and friends who see my wheelchair not as a boundary but as a part of me — someone still full of promise and potential.

One particularly memorable moment was when our class was scheduled to be held on the second floor. That day, the elevator happened to be out of order. Without hesitation, the lecturer and my classmates decided to move the entire session downstairs so I could attend. It wasn't a grand gesture — it was a simple, instinctive act of inclusion.

Between Law and Reality

This is not a plea for sympathy. It is a call to be seen as who we truly are: individuals with the will to contribute. While Indonesia has made legislative strides — notably with the 2016 Disability Rights Law, shifting the paradigm from charity to rights — implementation still lags. Regulations exist. But the real world is more complicated.

A Dream That Doesn't Sit Still: Life as a Student with Disability - 2



Arvan Setiawan with graduate students of Public Policy, University of Airlangga, Surabaya, Indonesia

At my university, I'm fortunate. Airlangga University has a Disability Services Unit that provides a safe space for students like me. Volunteers step in where systems fall short. There is a genuine institutional willingness to improve — ramps, elevators, and access services are emerging. They're not perfect, but they're progressing.

Still, many campuses across the country remain unprepared, lacking both infrastructure and cultural readiness. Written policies often outpace lived experiences. Accessibility exists more on paper than in practice.

The Challenges of Navigation

Being a student in a wheelchair is not merely about classroom participation. It's about access — to buildings, restrooms, and even transport. Many university buildings still have stairs without ramps, or elevators that are broken, crowded, or altogether absent. These barriers turn simple journeys into logistical challenges.

Getting to campus is another hurdle. Public transport in Indonesia is still largely inaccessible. Ride-hailing services become the only viable option — convenient but costly for a daily commute. Accessibility, I've learned, is not just about ramps. It's also about affordability and dignity.

"Equality should not be rare. It should be common — especially in education. Institutions must not become fortresses. They must be playgrounds for all minds."

Socially, I've been lucky. Lecturers treat me with respect, classmates include me naturally, and staff go out of their way to help. I feel seen, not pitied. I feel like a student — not an exception.

Yet I'm aware that many others are not so fortunate. Discrimination may not always shout — often it whispers in the form of stares, silences, or exclusions. My response is a smile. I've learned not to engage every stigma with outrage, but with resilience. Sometimes, grace is the most powerful rebuttal.

Shared Humanity

I've never felt excluded academically. My lecturers are open, understanding, and willing to adapt. The key is communication — and mutual respect. I participate fully in lectures, discussions, and assignments. I don't feel different. I feel equal — because the environment allows it.

One particularly memorable moment was when our class was scheduled to be held on the second floor. That day, the elevator happened to be out of order. Without hesitation, the lecturer and my classmates decided to move the entire session downstairs so I could attend. It wasn't a grand gesture — it was a simple, instinctive act of inclusion. But in that moment, I felt something profound: I wasn't being accommodated out of pity. I was being embraced as an equal. I felt seen, valued, and genuinely included — not just as a student with a disability, but as a full member of the learning community.

Inclusion Is Not a Luxury

Equality should not be rare. It should be common — especially in education. Institutions must not become fortresses. They must be playgrounds for all minds.

A Dream That Doesn't Sit Still: Life as a Student with Disability - 3

To policymakers: go beyond slogans. Let inclusive education be a measurable, enforceable priority. Accessibility must be real, not symbolic. Infrastructures that ignore disability implicitly deny humanity. When we build as though everyone can walk up stairs, we exclude by design.

To society: see us as whole. Disability is not deficiency. It is diversity. We are not the "lesser." We are human, just like you — with dreams, talents, and voices that deserve to be heard.

We Are Not Alone

To my fellow persons with disabilities: know this — you are not alone. Every step you take, even the smallest, is a defiant act of hope. Keep going. Whether with wheels, crutches, or determination alone — the world has room for your dreams, too.

In every push of my wheelchair, I move not just my body, but boundaries long left unchallenged. My journey is a quiet revolution — to prove that inclusion is not charity, and that the human spirit is not bound by flesh, but freed by will.

Let no one be left behind — not in policy, not in education, and never in humanity.

This article is provided by Arvan Setiawan, edited by Dr. rer.biol.hum. Boya Nugraha, MS



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How Cities Can Be Redesigned to Support Youth Mental Health - 1



In an era of rapid urbanization, cities are increasingly home to the world's adolescents and young adults — a trend set to grow, with 70% of children projected to live in urban areas by 2050. A groundbreaking study published in *Nature* (March 2024) reveals how city environments deeply influence the mental well-being of young people and presents a comprehensive, global framework to make cities “mental health-friendly” for youth.

Why Cities Matter for Youth Mental Health

Cities offer education, healthcare, and opportunities — the so-called “urban advantage.” But they also harbor risks: pollution, violence, discrimination, and unaffordable housing. These stressors hit adolescents hardest. Notably, 75% of mental health conditions manifest before age 24, making early intervention in urban settings crucial.

COVID-19 further exposed and worsened these inequalities. As schools closed and public spaces emptied, mental health challenges intensified — particularly among vulnerable and marginalized youth.

A Global Study to Define Mental Health-Friendly Cities

To respond, a consortium of over 500 experts, young people, educators, and policymakers from 53 countries conducted a three-part survey from 2020 to 2023. The goal: identify the key characteristics of cities that promote youth mental health.

Six Pillars of Mental Health-Friendly Cities

The study organized 37 characteristics into six interconnected domains using a socioecological model:

1. Personal Domain – Skills and Self-Worth

Top Priority: Teaching life skills and providing opportunities for growth. Youth should learn to manage emotions, build resilience, and pursue aspirations.

2. Interpersonal Domain – Relationships and Acceptance

Key finding: Safe and healthy relationships are foundational.

- Valuing youth voices and choices
- Encouraging intergenerational respect
- Creating safe peer relationships

3. Community Domain – Spaces and Inclusion

Top Priority: Access to safe public spaces. Parks, community centers, and social hubs foster connection and reduce loneliness.

4. Organizational Domain – Jobs and Education

Young people emphasized the need for:

- Secure, satisfying jobs
- Responsive, inclusive education systems
- Accessible youth-oriented healthcare

5. Policy Domain – Governance and Representation

Top Ranked:

- Youth involvement in city planning
- Gender equity and anti-discrimination policies

This indicates a shift from tokenism to genuine youth engagement in decision-making processes.

How Cities Can Be Redesigned to Support Youth Mental Health - 2

6. Environmental Domain – Green Space and Safety

The physical environment is vital. Youth need:

- Affordable housing
- Safe transport
- Green and blue spaces (parks, lakes)
- Access to mental healthcare

From Ideas to Action: What Cities Can Do

The study offers a roadmap for cities:

- Youth Co-Design: Engage youth in every step of policy and design. Programs like Growing Up Boulder in the U.S. show how this can work.
- Whole-School Mental Health Programs: Integrate well-being into school curricula and teacher training.
- Digital Access: Platforms like Chile's HealthyMind help youth access care remotely.
- Community Interventions: Programs in South Africa show that economic empowerment reduces violence and improves mental health.

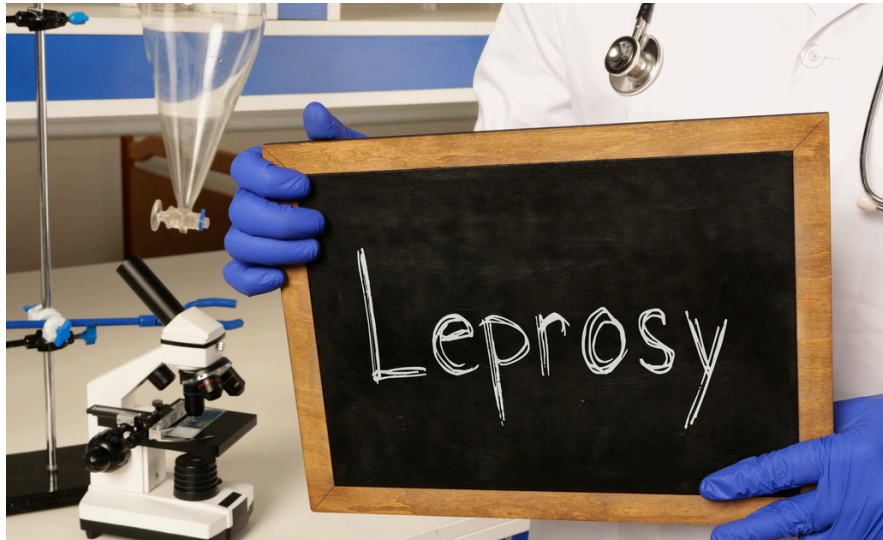
Creating mental health-friendly cities isn't just a policy ambition — it's a public health necessity. With youth mental disorders now the leading cause of disability among people aged 10–24 globally, cities must step up.

The blueprint is here. The evidence is clear. It's time to build cities where young people not only live — but thrive.

Reference: Collins PY, Sinha M, Concepcion T, Patton G, Way T, McCay L, Mensa-Kwao A, Herrman H, de Leeuw E, Anand N, Atwoli L. Making cities mental health friendly for adolescents and young adults. *Nature*. 2024 Mar 7;627(8002):137-48.

This article was written by Dr. rer.biol.hum. Boya Nugraha, MS

Leprosy Disability and Social Exclusion: Study Exposes Barriers to Participation - 1



A study has revealed the devastating impact of leprosy-related disabilities on patients' ability to participate in work, family life, and community activities in Indonesia. Published in PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases, the research highlights how physical impairments, compounded by stigma and lack of support, trap many leprosy survivors in isolation—even after medical cure.

Disability in leprosy isn't just about missing fingers or foot ulcers. It's about losing the ability to earn a living, care for your family, or even shake hands without fear of rejection.

Leprosy's Hidden Toll: More Than Just a Medical Condition

While leprosy is curable with multidrug therapy (MDT), many patients in Indonesia suffer lifelong disabilities due to nerve damage, deformities, and vision loss. The study, conducted in high-prevalence regions of West Kalimantan and Banten, assessed 267 patients using the WHO disability grading system and the Screening of Activity Limitation and Safety Awareness (SALSA) scale. The findings expose a crisis of exclusion:

- 66.3% had severe (Grade 2) hand disabilities, impairing tasks like cooking, writing, or manual labor.
- 68.2% had severe foot disabilities, limiting mobility and increasing fall risks.
- 71.5% reported activity limitations, with 27.8% facing moderate to extreme restrictions in daily life.

Disability in leprosy isn't just about missing fingers or foot ulcers. It's about losing the ability to earn a living, care for your family, or even shake hands without fear of rejection.

The Participation Crisis: Unemployment and Stigma

The study identified a direct link between disability severity and social exclusion:

- **Employment Barriers**
 - 53.2% of participants worked in informal jobs (e.g., farming, construction), but 19.5% were unemployed due to disabilities.
 - Patients with activity limitations were 2.59 times more likely to lose their jobs.
- **Education Gap**
 - Nearly half (48.3%) had no formal education, worsening their job prospects.
 - Low literacy also delayed treatment-seeking, leading to preventable disabilities.
- **Stigma's Stranglehold**
 - Self-stigma: Many patients hid at home, fearing ridicule.
 - Community stigma: Families avoided eating together; landlords evicted patients.

Leprosy Disability and Social Exclusion: Study Exposes Barriers to Participation - 2

Breaking the Cycle: Rehabilitation and Inclusion

The study calls for urgent action to address participation barriers:

- Integrated Rehabilitation Programs
 - Physical therapy: To improve hand function and mobility.
 - Assistive devices: Custom footwear, prosthetics, and adaptive tools.
 - Vocational training: Tailored to residual abilities (e.g., voice-based jobs for those with hand deformities).
- Community-Based Interventions
 - The KATAMATAKU initiative, launched by researchers, provides:
 - Eye and limb screenings to prevent disabilities.
 - Peer support groups to combat isolation.
 - teaching patients self-care and advocating their rights.
- Policy Shifts
 - Include leprosy in national disability laws to ensure access to social protection.
 - Train health workers to detect disabilities early.
 - Public awareness campaigns to reduce stigma.

A Path Forward

The study underscores that curing leprosy is only the first step. Without addressing disabilities and stigma, patients remain trapped in poverty and exclusion.

As Indonesia strives to eliminate leprosy by 2030, this research serves as a critical roadmap: medical care must go hand-in-hand with social and economic inclusion.

Reference: Menaldi, Sri Linuwih, Melinda Harini, Nelfidayani Nelfidayani, Yunia Irawati, Steven Setiono, Luh Karunia Wahyuni, Tri Rahayu, Gitalisa Andayani, Dewi Friska, and Boya Nugraha. "Functional activity limitation of leprosy cases in an endemic area in Indonesia and recommendations for integrated participation program in society." PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases 16, no. 8 (2022): e0010646.

This article was written by Dr. rer.biol.hum. Boya Nugraha, MS

Save the Date

Call for Applications to Host the 25th RI World Congress in 2028

As one of RI's most significant events, the World Congress is an unparalleled opportunity to bring together international leaders, experts, and advocates committed to advancing the rights and inclusion of persons with disability on a global level. The Congress serves as a vital platform for sharing knowledge, strengthening partnerships, and shaping global agendas.

Following the tremendous success of the 2024 World Congress in Abu Dhabi, we now invite RI Member Organizations to submit proposals to host the 2028 event. Please find attached the full announcement and supporting documents, which include:

- RI WC 2028 – General Outline
- RI WC 2028 – Bid National Host
- RI WC 2028 Bid for International Congress Host

These documents provide detailed information about the Congress vision and the requirements for hosting. They are available for download on the RI website: <https://www.riglobal.org/ri-announces-the-call-for-applications-to-host-the-25th-ri-world-congress-in-2028/>

The deadline for proposal submissions is **August 31, 2025**.

Should you have any questions or need further information, please do not hesitate to reach out.

We look forward to receiving your proposal and working together to make the 2028 World Congress another landmark event for the global disability community.

RI Governing Assembly 2025 combined with a RI Regional Conference

The RI Governing Assembly 2025 combined with a RI Regional Conference will be held in Delhi (India) from November 6-9, 2025. More detailed information will follow soon. Please check RI website

The Second World Summit on Social Development

The Second World Summit on Social Development will be held from Nov 4 to 6, 2025 in Doha (Qatar).

Call for contribution

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

We are excited to invite:

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

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

Why Contribute?

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

How to Submit?

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

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

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

We look forward to hearing from you soon!

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



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