

Overview

Section 1: An introduction to disability

1. What is disability?
2. Models of disability
3. Overview of the Disability Rights Movement
4. Disability law and rights globally
5. Major issues facing disabled people

Section 2: Disability & Debates

Questions

What is disability?

- Things that fall under the umbrella of disability:
 - physical impairments (e.g. being a wheelchair user)
 - long-term health conditions (e.g. diabetes, epilepsy, lupus)
 - mental health conditions (e.g. depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder)
 - being blind, visually impaired, hard of hearing, d/Deaf
 - neurodivergence (e.g. autism, ADHD, dyslexia, etc.)
- We expect these conditions to be long-term and they have some kind of activity limitation
- Many conditions can fluctuate and change over time
- A disability does not have to be visible or obvious to other people
- Around 15% (1 billion people) of the global population is disabled
- Disabled people and the Disability Rights Movement is not a monolith.
 - They share some common experiences, but different types of disability as well as people from other differing backgrounds (e.g. age, gender, race, sexuality, nationality) have vastly different experiences of disability.

Models of disability

Social Model

- Says that people are disabled by barriers in society, rather than their impairment or condition.
- The difficulties disabled people face are caused by external factors like inaccessibility and discrimination.
- Generally focus is put on removing those barriers in society.
- Pros: focuses on other people's attitudes and actions and preventing discrimination, strives to include people in the mainstream, doesn't paint the disabled person as the problem.
- Cons: does not accurately describe all of the experience of disability (e.g. chronic pain, internal anxieties), "removing pity" could be a political demotivator
- This is the model you are likely to see Disabled Peoples' Organisations (DPOs) use.

Medical Model

- Says that people are disabled by their impairments, medical conditions, differences, etc.
- The difficulties disabled people face are caused by the condition or impairment that they have.
- Generally focus is put on curing or managing a condition or impairment.
- Pros: sometimes medical treatment helps, leads to more targeted/specific resources and support
- Cons: does not accurately describe all of the experience of disability (e.g. discrimination), it paints disability as the problem, focus on cures and treatment that some people do not want
- This is the model you are likely to see medical providers and governments use (e.g. to administer welfare and benefits).

In reality, it is unlikely an organisation uses a pure medical or social model of disability. They probably use some mixture.

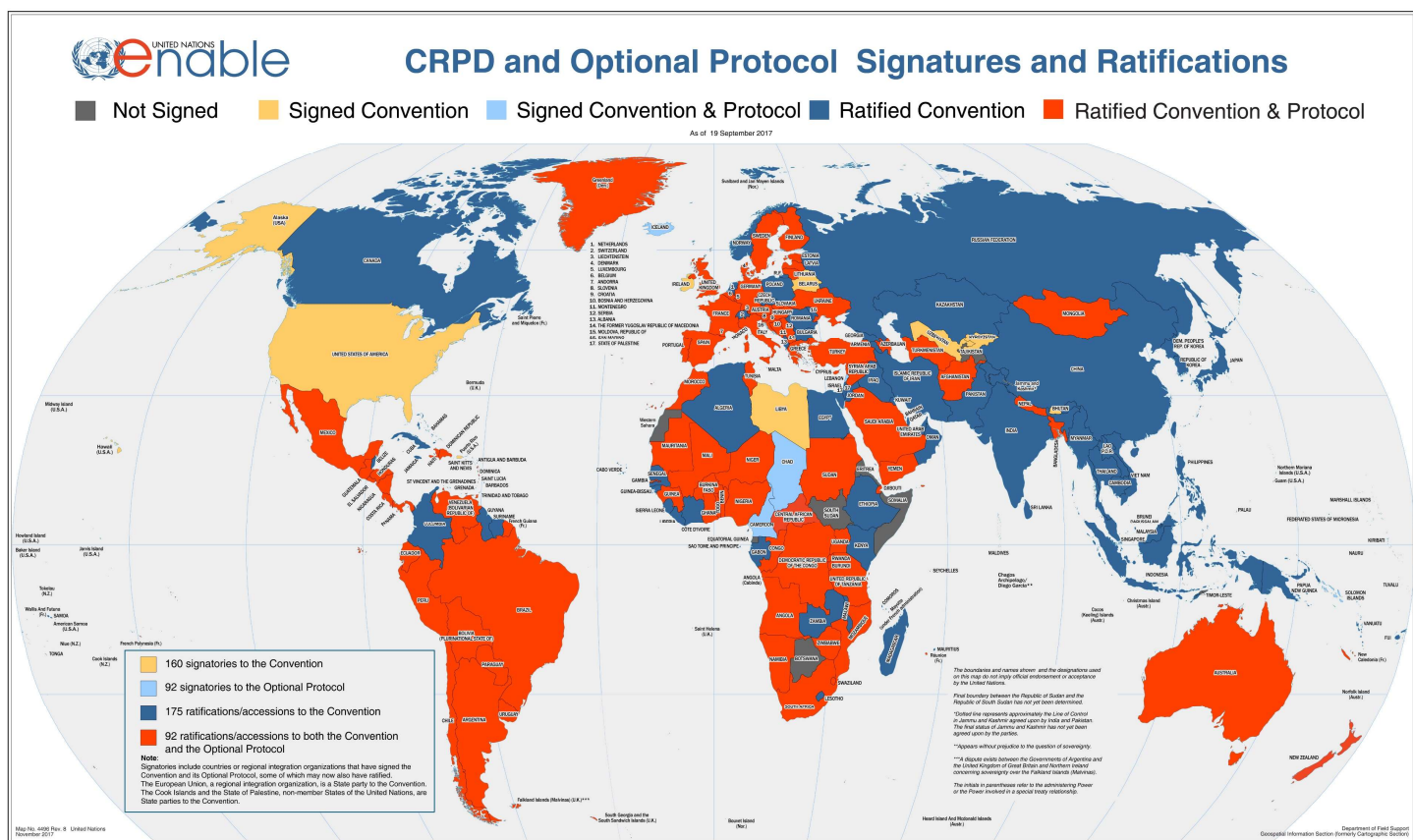
Overview of the disability rights movement

- Prior to the second world war, it was standard that disabled people were either institutionalised or segregated. Disabled people were often mocked and featured in things like freak shows.
- The rise of the Eugenics Movement at the beginning of the 20th Century led to increased forced segregation of disabled people, forced sterilisation, and the mass murder of disabled people. A number of these laws were not repealed until the 1970s.
 - Ugly Laws in the US
 - Mental Deficiency Bill & Feeble-Minded Control Bill in the UK
 - Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring (360,000 forced sterilizations) & the Holocaust (250,000-300,000 victims)
- After the First World War, there came to be competing views around disability and how it should be dealt with as many soldiers returned with “shell shock” but the change in attitudes did not always extend to civilians.
- After the Second World War, the knowledge of the atrocities in the Holocaust meant eugenics was opposed and governments moved away from forced sterilisation and segregation.
- At this time, disability rights became a more active movement and there were more protests and campaigns led by disabled people and DPOs, leading to the fall of segregation and institutionalisation of disabled people and greater legal protections.
 - A notable example is the US: the Civil Rights Movement inspired disabled people to organise for their rights. The 504 Sit-Ins led to the passing of the Rehabilitation Act, and continued organising from there led to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Disability rights and law globally

- Most countries recognise some kind of legal protections for disabled people, although the extent of those legal protections and the enforcement of them differs greatly across the world.
- The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been ratified by 180 states and the EU. A number of states have signed but not ratified it also.
 - It calls for efforts to prevent disability discrimination, ensure accessibility, ensure right to work, and provide social protections and welfare.
 - It also specifically prohibits practices like compulsory sterilisation and requires that states recognise a person's legal capacity and allow them to vote.

Disability rights and law globally



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Disability rights and law in Europe

- The UN CRPD investigated the UK for what it called “grave and systemic” human rights violations against disabled people in response to the changes to welfare and benefits like the assessment procedure for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and social care, and the closure of the Independent Living Fund. The UK Government rejected all of the recommendations. The UK was the first country to be subject to such an investigation.
- Europe as a region has generally good legal protections for disabled people but there are still issues in ensuring accessibility in information and public services.
 - Legislation exists here but is often not fully adhered to or enforced.
 - In some cases, legislation on physical access only applies to the public sector and not private buildings (e.g. in Ireland and Serbia).
 - Government websites and documents are often not fully accessible (although this has improved in recent years).

Major issues facing disabled people

- **Accessibility:** disabled people often do not have equal access to information, services, and the physical environment. Even with other legal protections, this limits people's access to education, enfranchisement, employment, and harms wellbeing.
- **Intolerant Views & Ideas:** disabled people are often viewed as lesser or completely incapable and in some communities disability is seen as being a punishment or an act of God. This leads to discriminatory acts, social exclusion, hate crime, and complete segregation.
 - Specific disabilities also face certain stigmas (e.g. physical deformities, neurodevelopmental disorders, mental health conditions). This leads to poor acceptance in wider society, but also in disability groups themselves.
- **Institutionalisation & Guardianship:** leads to a lack of personal enfranchisement and control over their own life, as well as to abuse. This can happen both formally and informally as most disabled people are reliant on their families or carers.
- **Lack of access to social welfare:** disabled people are often reliant on benefits due to the increased costs of disability and their lack of access to work. This leads disabled people to disproportionately experience poverty.
- **Lack of platforming of disabled voices:** a large proportion of major disability charities (e.g. Scope, Autism Speaks) are not run by disabled people themselves. They are often run by the parents or carers of disabled people, who have differing views on disability (e.g. that it is a burden, should be cured, etc.). This is also reflective of the way we see disability depicted in the media and in politics. This leads to a lot of the medical treatments, political changes, social views, etc. not being reflective of what disabled people want (e.g. cochlear implants, inspiration porn).
- Lack of access to healthcare
- Employment discrimination (e.g. sheltered workshops)
- Lack of access to equal education
- Interaction between disability and other marginalisation

Disability in debates

- A number of debates explicitly reference disability and mental health
 - “This House regrets the increasing trend of popular shows featuring neurodivergence* as the central theme.” – Novi Sad EUDC
 - “This House would require deaf parents to send their children (whether deaf or hearing) to mainstream schools for their primary and secondary education.” – De La Salle WUDC
 - “This House would allow mental health charities to sue media outlets for the defamation of the mentally ill” – Birmingham IV 2015
- There are also lots of debates where disability is a relevant issue
 - There are debates where disabled people are an important actor because they are highly affected by economic policy, human rights policy, etc.
 - “THW replace existing welfare systems with a universal basic income.” - HWS North American Universities Debating Championship
 - “This house supports job security legislation.” – Mexico WUDC
 - There are also debates where disability is a relevant impact because poverty, other forms of discrimination, poor mental wellbeing, etc. can cause disability.
 - The Disability Rights Movement is also a good example of a social justice movement that has been able to get systematic change (e.g. the ADA in the US).

Questions?