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**OPD Report on the Systemic Discrimination Faced by Persons with
Disabilities in Employment, Education, and Climate Adaptation Planning**

Submitted by AccessibilityAtlas

an organization of young persons advancing disability rights throughout the world

for the

**78th Session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
08-26 September 2025**

Submitted 6 August 2025

OPD Contribution for the Review of the Russia

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Introduction

AccessibilityAtlas presents this report to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ahead of the 78th session for the review of the Russian Federation. AccessibilityAtlas is a global non-profit organization based in the United States, committed to creating a world where persons of all abilities can fully participate in their communities without barriers.

AccessibilityAtlas collaborates with civil society, international mechanisms, institutions of higher education, and local governments to catalyze change around the thematic issues of accessibility in civic life, education, and climate resilience for persons with disabilities worldwide. We actively engage with the United Nations human rights mechanisms in Geneva and beyond to address accessibility gaps and advocate for systemic solutions grounded in the lived experiences of persons with disabilities.

Our reporting process involves comprehensive research on nation-states under review by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), dialogue with civil society and individuals with disabilities in those countries, and collaborative drafting of reports to highlight successes, challenges, and gaps in accessibility.

This report focuses on three main issues as they relate to persons with disabilities in the Russian Federation: (1) employment discrimination and economic exclusion; (2) climate change adaptation and heightened vulnerability in disasters; and (3) educational exclusion and continued institutional segregation.

We offer our findings and recommendations with the goal of supporting the Committee's work in holding State Parties accountable for their obligations under the International Covenant

on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and in advancing disability-inclusive development in all regions of the Russian Federation.

Employment Discrimination and Barriers for Persons With Disabilities

Limited Employment Opportunities and Discriminatory Hiring Practices

A large part of employment discrimination in Russia is based on disability status. This is best illustrated by a 28-year-old woman with low vision in Moscow, who was told by potential employers "You see badly. How are you going to work with children?" as she applied for a school psychologist position.¹

Official statistics have shown that only ~20% of Russia's persons with disabilities (PWDs) are employed, and only ~32% of the 2.5 million PWDs of working age are employed.² Even though data from 2023 shows a 6.2% increase (equivalent to 1.6 million individuals) in employment among PWDs as compared to the prior year, the rate remains much lower than the rest of the country's population.³ The effects of these statistics are evident, as PWDs are twice as likely to live in poverty.⁴

In 2017, the Russian government enacted laws prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of disability, resulting in approximately 39,000 entities being prosecuted for violations.⁵ As of 2024, the government aimed to increase the employment rate of PWDs by 10%.⁶ One of the main strategies for achieving this goal was offering free retraining programs for positions such as hotel administrator, sales manager, and tour guide.⁷ As part of the same reform, the government has begun implementing quota systems that require employers to reserve spots for PWDs.

¹ *Human Rights Watch*:

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/09/11/russia-end-hurdles-people-disabilities>

² *DisabilityIN*:

<https://disabilityin.org/country/russian-federation/>

³ *Meduza*:

<https://meduza.io/en/feature/2024/04/22/in-demand-and-unaccommodated>

⁴ *The Borgen Project*:

<https://borgenproject.org/disability-and-poverty-in-russia-2/>

⁵ *UN OHCHR*:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2018/03/committee-rights-persons-disabilities-examines-report-russia>

⁶ *Meduza*:

<https://meduza.io/en/feature/2024/04/22/in-demand-and-unaccommodated>

⁷ *Meduza*:

<https://meduza.io/en/feature/2024/04/22/in-demand-and-unaccommodated>

We urge the Committee to ask: **What specific measures will the Russian delegation take to ensure that anti-discrimination laws in employment are enforced and ensure reasonable accommodations are provided to dissolve barriers that prevent PWDs from accessing equal employment opportunities?**

Systematic employment discrimination remains a continuing problem despite some legislative progress. The lack of employment opportunities for PWDs perpetuates systemic economic inequality. We urge the Committee to compel the Russian government to strengthen enforcement of anti-discrimination laws in employment, and to establish requirements for reasonable accommodations. The government should also expand job training programs specifically designed for PWDs and create financial incentives for employers who demonstrate inclusive hiring practices.

Climate Change Adaptation and Vulnerability of Persons With Disabilities

Inadequate Protection of Marginalized Groups in Climate Adaptation Planning

As the world's largest country, Russia is experiencing climate change at a rate faster than the global average. Nonetheless, its climate adaptation efforts continue to fall short in addressing the heightened vulnerabilities faced by PWDs. Despite being among the most severely impacted during climate-related emergencies—with disproportionately higher rates of morbidity and mortality—PWDs remain among the least able to access emergency support, care, and protection.⁸ Climate-related threats such as heat waves, flooding and extreme weather events are a particular risk to PWDs who face mobility, sensory, or cognitive barriers to emergency responses.

As of June 2022, Russia had approved 10 sectoral adaptation plans that cover transport, energy, construction, healthcare, and emergency response.⁹ However, these plans do not systematically address the specific needs of PWDs. The recent flooding within the Orenburg Region exposed Russia's inadequate preparation for climate disasters; many authorities were extremely underprepared for this type of weather event that disproportionately affected many

⁸ UN OHCHR:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/climate-change/impact-climate-change-rights-persons-disabilities>

⁹ Wiley Online Library:

<https://wires.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/wcc.872>

vulnerable populations.¹⁰ Regional governments are consistently under-resourced and heavily in debt, limiting capacity to implement inclusive disaster preparedness measures.¹¹

Regions such as Belgorod, Volgograd, Vologda, Kemerovo, Kursk, Penza, and Crimea have developed regional adaptation plans that address local extreme weather events and agricultural vulnerabilities.¹² The government has acknowledged climate vulnerabilities and has begun creating climate considerations into federal emergency management protocols.¹³ Still, these measures do not have specific provisions for ensuring the safety and inclusion of PWDs in emergency planning and response periods.

There remains little implementation of actual adaptations despite the awareness of vulnerabilities. Emergency warning systems and evacuation procedures are not designed with accessibility in mind, which leaves many PWDs unable to receive or respond to critical safety information. The reduction in international hydrocarbon demand can further constrain federal budgets as climate adaptation costs rise, ultimately limiting the resources available for inclusive emergency preparedness.¹⁴

We urge the Committee to ask: **What steps will the Russian delegation take to ensure that climate adaptation plans systematically include the needs of PWDs, especially in emergency warning systems, evacuation procedures, and disaster response protocols?**

Even though Russia has acknowledged some climate vulnerabilities, many gaps remaining in protecting PWDs during climate emergencies. We urge the Committee to recommend that Russia mandate the inclusion of disability considerations in all climate adaptation planning, ensure accessible emergency warning systems and evacuation procedures, and establish dedicated funding for disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction measures across all 85 federal regions.

¹⁰ *Euronews*:

<https://www.euronews.com/green/2024/04/27/is-russia-ready-for-climate-change-mass-floods-expose-lack-of-adaptation-campaigners-say>

¹¹ *CSIS*:

<https://www.csis.org/analysis/climate-change-will-reshape-russia>

¹² *Wiley Online Library*:

<https://wires.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/wcc.872>

¹³ *Wiley Online Library*:

<https://wires.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/wcc.872>

¹⁴ *CSIS*:

<https://www.csis.org/analysis/climate-change-will-reshape-russia>

Educational Exclusion and Institutional Segregation

Barriers to Inclusive Education and Continued Institutionalization

Russia has consistently segregated children with disabilities in its education system through institutionalization and limited access to inclusive education. There are between 400,000 and 600,000 children currently under institutional care in Russia, many of whom receive education in segregated facilities rather than in their communities.¹⁵ Barriers such as lack of physical accessibility, inadequate accommodations, and insufficient teacher training prevent children with disabilities from attending inclusive schools.¹⁶

While over 800,000 children with special needs were able to enroll in Russia's primary and general education systems during the 2022/2023 school year, only 22,000 students with disabilities pursued higher education.¹⁷ Federal Statistics show that 2.3% of all children in Russia (729,000 students under age 18) had special educational needs.¹⁸ Even though there are technically legal requirements for inclusive education in Russia, most children with disabilities still lack access to public education in many settings. This is due to institutions being regulated by different ministries that base education access on perceived "educability."¹⁹ This approach makes education a privilege rather than a human right. Furthermore, the Protection Ministry shows that among persons in Russia who have received higher education, students with disabilities graduate at rates "two times lower than the number of non-disabled people."²⁰

St. Petersburg's schools have begun developing inclusive education programs for children with disabilities, receiving over 9.7 million rubles in funding following developments in 2013.²¹ The Russian government has also implemented the "Accessible Environment 2011-2015"

¹⁵ *Wikipedia:*

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institutionalization_of_children_with_disabilities_in_Russia

¹⁶ *Human Rights Watch:*

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/09/01/left-out/obstacles-education-people-disabilities-russia>

¹⁷ *Statista:*

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1129496/students-with-disabilities-in-russia-by-education-type/>

¹⁸ *MDPI:*

<https://www.mdpi.com/2227-7102/14/3/312>

¹⁹ *Wikipedia:*

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institutionalization_of_children_with_disabilities_in_Russia

²⁰ *Wikipedia:*

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institutionalization_of_children_with_disabilities_in_Russia

²¹ *Wikipedia:*

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institutionalization_of_children_with_disabilities_in_Russia

state program in order to improve mainstream schools' physical accessibility and adapt environments for students with special educational needs.²²

We urge the Committee to ask: What measures will the Russian delegation take to put an end to the institutionalization of children with disabilities as well as ensure their right to inclusive education in all schools?

Despite some regional initiatives, Russia's education system continues to exclude children with disabilities from mainstream education. We urge the Committee to recommend that Russia slowly cease new placements of children with disabilities in segregated institutions, mandate accessibility standards for all schools, provide comprehensive teacher training on inclusive education, and establish timeline-bound targets for transitioning to fully inclusive education systems in all regions.

Conclusion

Russia's treatment of PWDs in areas such as employment, climate adaptation, education, and digital access demonstrates systemic violations of the economic, social, and cultural rights guaranteed under the International Covenant. Even though Russia has passed some laws to protect PWDs, these laws are often poorly enforced. As a result, millions of Russians with disabilities still cannot fully participate in society.

Russia continues to allow workplace discrimination against PWDs, fails to protect them during climate emergencies, segregates children with disabilities from their peers, and makes it difficult for them to access government websites and information. These ongoing problems show that Russia is not meeting its legal obligations to treat PWDs equally. These violations harm individual citizens and undermine Russia's social and economic development.

We urge the Committee to call upon Russia to immediately implement inclusive reforms, including enforceable anti-discrimination measures, inclusive climate adaptation planning and a systematic transition to inclusive education. Such actions are a critical step toward Russia fulfilling its human rights obligations and ensuring dignity and equality for all its citizens.

This report may be published on the CESCER webpage to the general public. Direct enquiries to admin@accessibilityatlas.org. This report was authored by James Jin and Dinu Antonescu.

²² MDPI:
<https://www.mdpi.com/2227-7102/14/3/312>