

Factsheet on Dalits with Disabilities

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Who Are 'Dalits'?

"The term 'Dalit' means 'oppressed' and originates from the Indo-Aryan root 'Dal,' which means 'to press' or 'to crush.'ⁱ

National Dalits Commission defines "Dalits" as "those communities who, by virtue of atrocities of caste-based discrimination and untouchability, are most backward in social, economic, educational, political, and religious fields, and deprived of human dignity and social justice." Dalits are communities that have historically faced systemic exclusion, economic marginalization, and social discrimination, including practices of untouchability. Dalits are a large and historically marginalized group of South Asian people.ⁱⁱ

Who Are 'Dalits with Disabilities'?

Dalits with disabilities represent one of the most marginalized, invisibilized and underrepresented groups, facing entrenched and compounded discrimination at the intersection of caste, disability, and often gender. "Dalit" refers to the historic and ongoing exclusion rooted in caste-based oppression and the violence of untouchability, while "disability" signifies the systemic barriers and stigma faced by persons with impairments. Together, "Dalits with Disabilities" underscores the urgent reality of individuals who are subjected to multiple, overlapping layers of exclusion. Their experiences demand an intersectional human rights-based approach that challenges structural inequality, amplifies their voices, and centers their leadership in the movement for social justice and inclusion.

Prevalence of Dalits with Disabilities

There are an estimation that 260 million Dalits worldwide.ⁱⁱⁱ The vast majority of Dalits live in South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri-Lanka) and in communities who migrated from South Asia across the globe.^{iv} Persons with disabilities constitute 16% of the world's population, with 80% living in the Global South.^v Though there is no any data on the prevalence of Dalits with Disabilities accurately, it can be estimated that Dalits with Disabilities should be 16% of the 260 million Dalits – 41.6 million Dalits with Disabilities. However, it should be noted that there is an estimation that 80% of them live in the poor countries like South Asia Region. So, there is higher prevalence of Dalits with Disabilities in the South Asia Region.

The Population Census of 2078 reports that there are 13.4% (3,898,990) Dalits in Nepal.^{vi} The same census reports that 2.2% of Nepal's population lives with some form of disability, with 54.2% of persons with disabilities being male and 45.8% female. Based on disaggregated data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, the reported total population of Dalits with disabilities is 2.4% of the total Dalit population. However, Dalit with disabilities rights advocates contest this figure, citing significant undercounting due to methodological gaps and inappropriate approaches to identifying persons with disabilities within Dalit communities. Accurate data collection remains critical to ensuring the visibility, rights protection, and inclusion of Dalits with disabilities.

Vicious Cycle of Poverty, Caste, and Disability: Experience of Dalits with Disabilities

The poverty and disability has a vicious cycle since poverty causes disability, and disability causes deeper poverty — unless systemic barriers are removed. Dalits are the poorest of the poor. In Nepal, Dalits are disproportionately affected by poverty. About 42% Dalit live below the poverty line (43.6 % of Hill Dalit and 38.2% Terai Dalit) which is very far above the national poverty rate of 25.2%.^{vii} The evidence underscores that



Dalits with disabilities are among the most marginalized, facing extreme poverty both within the Dalit community and across the broader disability sector.

Legal Recognition of Dalits with Disabilities

Dalits with disabilities remain legally invisible in Nepal's current legislative framework. The Act Relating to Persons with Disabilities 2017 (as amended first in 2018), adopts a predominantly medical model of disability, defining and classifying disability based solely on types of impairments and degrees of severity. Critically, the Act does not address the intersectionality of caste and disability, nor does it acknowledge the compounded discrimination faced by marginalized groups such as Dalits with disabilities. This narrow framing perpetuates exclusion and denies Dalits with disabilities the full legal recognition and protection they are entitled to under international human rights standards.

Some Facts about Dalits with Disabilities

Dalits with Disabilities Association Nepal did a research study on the human rights situation of Dalits with disabilities in Nepal in 2025. The study revealed the various facts on Dalits with disabilities -

- Dalits are among the most marginalized caste groups in Nepal, facing entrenched structural discrimination that intersects deeply with disability-based exclusion.
- Persons with disabilities constitute approximately 2.2% of Nepal's population, and Dalits with disabilities remain largely invisible in national data systems, limiting targeted policy interventions.
- Dalit communities often live in extreme poverty-dense and geographically disadvantaged areas, increasing exposure to health risks, injuries, malnutrition, and preventable impairments.
- Dalits with Disabilities face multiple discriminations – on the basis of caste, disability, and often gender including other grounds — leading to increased vulnerabilities in education, health, livelihood, and justice.
- School enrolment and completion rates for Dalit children with disabilities remain significantly lower than national averages due to stigma, discriminatory treats, inaccessible schools, bullying, and economic barriers.
- Dalits with disabilities have limited access to assistive devices, rehabilitation services, and disability allowances due to geographic, bureaucratic, and caste-based obstacles.
- Gender-based discrimination intensifies for Dalit women and girls with disabilities, who face heightened risks of violence, exploitation, limited mobility, and exclusion from community decision-making.
- Cases of caste-based violence often go unreported or unaddressed, especially when the survivor is a person with disability, due to fear of retaliation, weak justice mechanisms, and systemic bias.
- Representation of Dalits with disabilities in local government, disability-specific bodies, and Dalit rights forums remains extremely low, leading to weak policy influence.
- Dalits with disabilities have limited participation in organizations of persons with disabilities, with leadership positions still predominantly occupied by non-Dalit groups, contributing to exclusion within disability movements themselves.
- Access to SRHR, WASH, and public services is severely restricted due to caste-based segregation, inaccessible infrastructure, and discriminatory practices in health facilities.
- Dalits with disabilities are disproportionately affected by unemployment and informal labor dependence, with very few benefiting from skills training or employment quotas.
- Disaster response systems frequently overlook Dalits with disabilities, resulting in delayed assistance, food insecurity, and exclusion from recovery and reconstruction processes.

- Despite constitutional protections, implementation gaps in anti-discrimination laws and disability rights legislation continue to limit meaningful inclusion and justice.
- Dalits with disabilities face extreme climate risks, living in hazard-prone areas and being four–five times more likely to be left behind during evacuation due to intersectional barriers.
- Dalits with disabilities have the lowest access rates to social security allowances, as caste-based discrimination, lack of documentation, and distance to ward offices often prevent registration—resulting in many eligible Dalits with disabilities being excluded from disability ID cards and the monthly allowance system despite legal entitlements.
- Dalits with disabilities have limited access to essential care and support, as poverty, social stigma, and caste-based discrimination often exclude them from community care networks and formal support services.

Dalit with Disabilities Association Nepal [DDAN]: A Brief Introduction

Dalit with Disabilities Association Nepal is an emerging non-for-profit making organization of persons with disabilities purely founded and led-by Dalits with disabilities. DDAN is formally registered at district administration office of Kathmandu in September 15, 2023 and has affiliation with Social Welfare Council. DDAN is unique in its leadership and governance due to its constitutional mandate to ensure the leadership of young Dalit women and girls with disabilities with their majority.

DDAN envisions a just, inclusive, and equitable society where Dalits with disabilities enjoy full dignity, rights, and opportunities, free from caste, disability, and gender-based discrimination. Its mission is to empower Dalits with disabilities by advocating for their rights, dismantling caste- and disability-based discrimination, promoting inclusive development, and strengthening leadership and participation at all levels of society. Anchored in the principles of dignity, equality, and empowerment, DDAN strives to promote systemic change and build an inclusive society for Dalits with disabilities. For more information please visit the website at <http://www.ddan.org.np>

ⁱ https://www.epitomejournals.com/VolumeArticles/FullTextPDF/88_Research_Paper.pdf

ⁱⁱ <https://www.dignitypost.com/news/2023/10/100, Dr. Drona Prakasha Rasali – Who are the Dalits in South Asia, and what should one know about them in the 21st century?>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/EU_Brief1.pdf

^{iv} OHCHR. Caste-based Discrimination. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. <https://www.ohchr.org>

^v <https://www.undrr.org/report/2023-gobal-survey-report-on-persons-with-disabilities-and-disasters>

^{vi} Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), National Population and Housing Census 2021: Summary Results, Government of Nepal, 2022

^{vii} United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights. (2019). UN expert on extreme poverty presents his visit report to Nepal, highlighting concerns about Dalits and their susceptibility to poverty. ReliefWeb. Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/nepal/un-expert-extreme-pover-ty-presents-his-visit-report-nepal-highlighting-his-concerns-about-dalits-and-their-susceptibility-poverty>