



Viet Nam's Rights-Based Shift in Disability Inclusion: A Landmark Policy Direction and Implications for Programming and Development Partnerships

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I. Introduction

[Conclusion No. 444-TB/VPTW](#), issued following the General Secretary's working session with the Government Party Committee and line ministries on 3 December 2025, marks a historic milestone in Viet Nam's progress towards disability inclusion. For the first time, a high-level Party conclusion clearly and formally affirms that persons with disabilities are *"an integral part of the national community, with equal rights to live, learn, work, and participate in social life as other citizens."* This affirmation is not merely symbolic. It sends a powerful message of belonging, dignity, and equal value, directly challenging stigma and charity-based perceptions, and reinforcing disability inclusion as a core dimension of social cohesion and sustainable development.

This recognition aligns directly with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with

Disabilities (CRPD) principle of *respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity* (Article 3), and the right to equality and non-discrimination (Article 5), as well as with Viet Nam's Law on Persons with Disabilities (2010), which positions persons with disabilities as rights-holders rather than passive recipients of assistance. By framing disability inclusion as a hallmark and indicator of "a civilised and sustainable" society, the Conclusion establishes a strong normative foundation for programming and development cooperation grounded in human rights. The Conclusion also comes at a moment of heightened international engagement for Viet Nam, including under the CRPD and with broader human rights diplomacy. Such proactive involvement illustrates how international integration has increasingly become a key strategic endeavour for the country, strengthening the interface between

international recommendations and domestic reform priorities.

Importantly, this political affirmation echoes what persons with disabilities themselves have consistently articulated through nation-wide surveys, policy research, and consultations. Evidence generated by UNDP and research partners over the past decade shows that exclusion is driven less by impairment and more by barriers in law, infrastructure, attitudes, and systems across social, economic and policy sphere. Conclusion No. 444-TB/VPTW reflects a willingness of the Party and the Central Party Office to translate this evidence into political guidance. The next step is to clarify how these directions will be operationalised in practice—across sectors and levels of government—through concrete standards, resourcing, and accountability mechanisms.

II. In-depth Analysis

1. From Charity and Medical Models to Social Inclusion and Rights

A defining feature of Conclusion 444-TB/VPTW is the decisive shift away from a charity-based and medicalised approach toward a social inclusion and rights-based framework. The Conclusion explicitly calls for transforming policies from “medical care” to “social inclusion,” focusing on eliminating stigma, reducing inequality, expanding opportunities, and empowering persons with disabilities.

This represents a qualitative change in policy framing. While Viet Nam’s legal and policy landscape has long acknowledged the rights of persons with disabilities, implementation has often remained centred on impairment assessment and welfare delivery rather than on addressing social, environmental, and institutional barriers.

By explicitly endorsing a “social-inclusion” approach, Conclusion 444-TB/VPTW signals that these analytical insights have been heard at the highest political level. The shift also reinforces the guidelines of the National Action Plan to Support Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030, which prioritises inclusive education,

employment, accessibility, and participation. In practical terms, this implies complementing universal design with reasonable accommodation—case-by-case adjustments in schools, workplaces, and services—so that persons with disabilities can exercise agency and rights on an equal basis.

For UNDP and development partners, this provides a clear entry point to design programmes that remove systemic barriers, strengthen enabling environments, and support the agency and leadership of persons with disabilities.

2. An Integrated, Cross-Sectoral and Mandatory Approach to Inclusion

The Conclusion moves beyond sector-specific interventions and clearly recognises that caring for and ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities is “*a responsibility of the whole political system.*” It calls for an integrated, cross-sectoral response and assigns concrete responsibilities to line ministries and local authorities. Crucially, it underscores that ensuring disability inclusion is mandatory, not optional.

To translate this mandate into action, assigned responsibilities need to be matched with dedicated budgets, measurable indicators, and routine monitoring and reporting mechanisms (including participation by organizations of persons with disabilities—OPDs) across sectors and levels.

By explicitly assigning tasks to ministries responsible for health, education, construction, finance, and information systems, Conclusion 444-TB/VPTW addresses the existing unwilling, fragmented and siloed implementation of policies on persons with disabilities, and reconfirms the role of institutions like the National Committee on Disabilities (NCD) to support inter-ministerial coordinated actions. This framing mirrors CRPD Article 4(1) on whole-of-government responsibility and Article 33 on coordinated national implementation, while reinforcing the enforceability of the Law on Persons with Disabilities (2010).

For development partners, it encourages long-term systemic investments in governance reform, inter-ministerial coordination, and institutional capacity development, rather than isolated or project-based interventions.

3. Accessibility and Universal Design as a Mandatory Standard

One of the most transformative elements of Conclusion 444-TB/VPTW is its explicit declaration that accessibility is a mandatory obligation and must be incorporated from the design stage of infrastructure and services. This directly reflects evidence accumulated through multiple accessibility assessments conducted on both digital and physical service infrastructure.

The First Review of *Accessibility and User Friendliness of 63 Provincial E-Service Portals* (IPS & UNDP, 2023)¹ and its 2024 follow-up² found that none of the provincial portals fully met basic WCAG 2.0 accessibility standards. Additionally, the “Pilot assessment of disability inclusion in local governance” conducted by MDRI and UNDP in 2022 found that only 2.9

percent of surveyed persons with disabilities had successfully used local e-service portals³. A significant digital divide is highlighted in the IPS-UNDP’s *2025 review of provincial e-service portals from a user perspective*: while over 95 percent of internet users in Viet Nam use smartphones, most public portals are not mobile-optimised, excluding many persons with disabilities who do not own desktop computers.⁴

Similarly, persistent physical barriers are presented in infrastructure surveys. A nationwide survey by the Viet Nam Association for the Protection of the Disabled and Orphans (2020) found that only 27.5 percent of over 15,000 public buildings had wheelchair ramps, with accessibility lowest at the commune level.⁵ Regarding the accessibility of district hospitals in particular, the UNDP’s “Assessment of disability inclusion in local governance” in 2023 also pointed out that while service attitudes are rated highly (89.1 percent), the infrastructure remains a barrier, with only 49 percent having elevators and 57.2 percent having accessible toilets.⁶ These findings

¹ Institute for Policy Studies and Media Development, & United Nations Development Programme. (2023). First review of accessibility and user friendliness of 63 provincial e-service portals in 2023. Ha Noi, Viet Nam: IPS & UNDP. Available at: <https://ips.org.vn/en/library/first-review-of-accessibility-and-userfriendliness-of-63-provincial-eservice-portals-in-2023-ct270.html>.

² Institute for Policy Studies and Media Development, & United Nations Development Programme. (2024). Review of 63 provincial e-service portals from a user perspective in 2024 (Governance and Participation: A Series of Policy Discussion Papers). Ha Noi, Viet Nam: IPS & UNDP. Available at: https://papi.org.vn/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/ENG_Review-of-63-Provincial-E-Service-Portals-from-a-User-Perspective-in-2024..pdf.

³ Mekong Development Research Institute, & United Nations Development Programme. (2023). Pilot assessment of disability inclusion in local governance (Governance and Participation: A Series of Policy Discussion Papers). Ha Noi, Viet Nam: MDRI & UNDP. Available at: https://papi.org.vn/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Assessing-disability-inclusion-in-local-governance-ENG_Final.pdf.

⁴ Institute for Policy Studies and Media Development, & United Nations Development Programme. (2025). 2025 review of provincial e-service portals from a user perspective: Recommendations for the transition period. (Governance and Participation: A Series of Policy Discussion Papers). Ha Noi, Viet Nam: IPS & UNDP. Available at: <https://papi.org.vn/eng/danh-gia-cong-dich-vu-cong-cap-tinh-tu-goc-do-nguoi-dung-nam-2025-va-de-xuat-cho-qua-trinh-chuyen-doi-trong-giai-doan-toi/>.

⁵ Conclusions of the Survey Program on Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities: 15,123 facilities were surveyed, and 1,834 officials were interviewed. Available at: <https://asvho.vn/tong-ket-chuong-trinh-dieu-tra-khao-sat-duong-tiep-can-voi-nkt-15123-cong-trinh-duoc-khao-sat-1834-can-bo-duoc-phong-van-a1093.html>.

⁶ Mekong Development Research Institute, & United Nations Development Programme in Viet Nam. (2024). Assessment of disability inclusion in local governance in 2023 (Governance and Participation: A Series of Policy Discussion Papers). Ha Noi, Viet Nam: MDRI & UNDP. Available at: <https://papi.org.vn/eng/danh-gia-muc-do-hoa-nhap-cua-nguoi-khuyet-tat-trong-quan-tri-dia-phuong-nam-2023/>.

underline how voluntary or encouragement-based approaches have been insufficient. Operationalising this shift to mandating the accessibility by design will likely require embedding accessibility requirements in public procurement and technical standards, coupled with independent accessibility audits and user testing (including OPDs) for both physical infrastructure and digital public services.

By stating that accessibility *is* "a mandatory responsibility, not merely an encouragement," and must be embedded from the design phase, the Conclusion operationalises CRPD Article 9 and aligns with global universal design principles. It also reinforces Chapter VII of the Law on Persons with Disabilities on accessibility of buildings, transport, and ICT.

For UNDP and partners, this provides a powerful policy anchor to mainstream accessibility across transport systems, public buildings, digital government, digital textbooks, and online public services.

4. Rights to Education, Work, and Full Socio-Political Participation

The Conclusion strongly reaffirms the rights to learn, work, and participate fully in social and political life, moving beyond assistance toward empowerment. This direction closely reflects empirical evidence on where exclusion is most acute.

A baseline assessment for the Marrakesh Treaty's implementation in Viet Nam co-conducted by UNDP and Viet Nam Blind Association in 2022 revealed that 62.1 percent and 61.2 percent of respondents with print disabilities reported that books and materials for natural sciences and for research or work, respectively, were often scarce or entirely unavailable. Additionally, 44.5 percent of

respondents indicated a lack of accessible textbooks and essential learning materials, limiting their ability to pursue formal education.⁷

UN agencies have supported the establishment and capacity development for inclusive education resource centres (IERCs) for years and piloted the accessible EPub textbook conversion and distribution system for students with print disabilities. A digital library housing all project textbooks and its client mobile app have been developed and widely shared with students in need. These first accessible EPub textbooks are helping students proactively explore knowledge, keep pace with their classmates without disabilities, and thus more meaningfully participate in educational activities. These projects are contributing to the inclusive education development and digital transformation strategy of the Ministry of Education and Training.

In terms of employment, the second National Survey on Disability shows that the labor force participation rate of PWD in 2023 is 23.9 percent, a 53.5 percentage point lower than that of people without disabilities (77.4 percent).⁸ The encouragement policies for enterprises to employ persons with disabilities seem not having proved their effectiveness, as tax incentives requiring enterprises to employ at least 30 percent persons with disabilities were unrealistic for small and medium enterprises, which account for around 90 percent of businesses in Viet Nam.⁹

Political participation data are equally stark. The "Assessment of Stakeholders' perspectives on the participation of persons with disabilities in elected bodies" (IDEA & UNDP, 2025) found that over 90 percent of respondents had never seen a person with disabilities serving as a deputy in the National Assembly or People's

⁷ United Nations Development Programme in Viet Nam & Viet Nam Blind Association. (2022). Situations of access to publications of persons with print disabilities in Viet Nam [Report]. UNDP in Viet Nam & Viet Nam Blind Association. [Unpublished]

⁸ General Statistics Office of Vietnam. (2025). Results of the survey on people with disabilities 2023 [Statistical report]. National Statistics Office. [https://www.nso.gov.vn/wp-](https://www.nso.gov.vn/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/2023_Bao-cao-Dieu-tra-nguoi-khuyet-tat.-pdf-1.pdf)

[content/uploads/2025/09/2023_Bao-cao-Dieu-tra-nguoi-khuyet-tat.-pdf-1.pdf](https://www.nso.gov.vn/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/2023_Bao-cao-Dieu-tra-nguoi-khuyet-tat.-pdf-1.pdf)

⁹ Nguyen, T. L. A., Aguin, J., & Pham, H. T. (2019). Improving employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in Viet Nam. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Viet Nam. P.43.

<https://www.undp.org/vietnam/publications/report-improving-employment-opportunities-persons-disabilities-viet-nam>

Councils.¹⁰ In the 15th National Assembly, only 0.8 percent of members (four deputies) were recognised as persons with disabilities, though primarily as war veterans rather than disability representatives.¹¹

Against this evidence base,¹² the Conclusion's calls to (i) develop IERCs and learning materials for students with visual and hearing impairments, and build capacities on inclusive teaching methods for teachers; (ii) expand employment and livelihood opportunities with more contributions from the private sector, social and community-based organizations; and (iii) simplify administrative procedures, raise awareness, and even "*research the structure of having National Assembly deputies who are persons with disabilities*". These messages represent a direct and meaningful response to documented exclusion. Implementation will also need to address intersectional barriers—particularly for women and girls with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities in rural areas—and strengthen community-based supports that enable independent living and participation. These provisions align with CRPD Articles 24, 27, 19, and 29 and provide strong entry points for UNDP and partners to integrate disability inclusion into human capital development, labour market reforms, and inclusive governance programmes.

5. Implications for Programming and International Cooperation

By grounding its directives in an integrated, rights-based, and mandatory framework, Conclusion 444-TB/VPTW strengthens the enabling environment for international cooperation by providing high-level political guidance that is consistent with Viet Nam's

¹⁰ United Nations Development Programme in Viet Nam, & Center of Research and Inclusive Development Action. (2025). Stakeholders' perspectives on the participation of persons with disabilities in elected bodies (Governance and Participation: A Series of Policy Discussion Papers). Ha Noi, Viet Nam: UNDP & IDEA. Available at: https://papi.org.vn/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Report-on-stakeholders-perspectives-on-the-participation-of-persons-with-disabilities-in-elected-bodies-Eng_Final.pdf.

treaty commitments and follow-up processes under CRPD. The coherence between the Conclusion and empirical research findings indicates that policy direction is being informed by evidence and lived experience.

For UNDP, the Conclusion provides additional momentum to continue supporting disability inclusion throughout its governance, digital transformation, and inclusive growth portfolios, with renewed emphasis on solutions for systems change (e.g., standards, accessibility-by-design, and whole-of-government coordination). For development partners, it offers confidence that investments in accessibility, inclusive services, employment, and participation are aligned with both national priorities and Viet Nam's commitments within the human rights ecosystem and can be further anchored through the Government's Master Plan to implement the CRPD Committee's recommendations.

The immediate priority now is to shape a clear pathway to translate "mandatory" accessibility and "whole political system" responsibility into concrete implementation arrangements, resourcing, and measurable accountability across sectors and levels of government.

III. Recommendations for Development Partners

To operationalise the transformative intent of Conclusion No. 444-TB/VPTW, development partners are encouraged to:

- **Enable whole-of-government and intersectoral coordination through practical support to Government-led mechanisms**, including facilitation of inter-ministerial working modalities, and learning

¹¹ Dao, T. H. (2025). Equal political participation: Ensuring the rights to vote and stand for election of persons with disabilities in Viet Nam [Policy Brief]. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Viet Nam. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/vietnam/publications/equal-political-participation-ensuring-rights-vote-and-stand-election-persons-disabilities-in-viet-nam>.

¹² Which was shared by UNDP with VFD and the National Assembly prior to the meeting with the General Secretary.

platforms that help translate mandates into deliverable actions.

- **Embed accessibility-by-design as a core requirement in partner-funded infrastructure and digital initiatives**, using these investments to demonstrate value and build government buy-in to develop and institutionalise their own universal design guidance and capacity-building programmes.
- **Finance and scale evidence-based inclusion models in education, employment, and livelihoods initiatives**, by investing in pilots that are designed for scale, documenting costs and lessons, and supporting the Government and OPDs to institutionalise best practices through national systems.
- **Enable meaningful participation of OPDs across the programme cycle** by financing OPDs' capacity and accessibility costs for consultation, co-design, monitoring, and evaluation; and by strengthening participation of persons with disabilities in the decision-making process Through capacity building for persons with disabilities and rights-based communication with stakeholders and the public.
- **Strengthen data and accountability ecosystems** through technical and financial support to disability-disaggregated data collection and use, as a precondition for evidence-based policymaking.
- **Accelerate the progress of the Government's implementation of the CRPD recommendations** by providing shared learning opportunities and coordinated assistance.

IV. Conclusion

Conclusion No. 444-TB/VPTW is a landmark directive that redefines disability inclusion in Viet Nam as a question of rights, dignity, and social justice. By affirming persons with disabilities as an integral part of society, mandating accessibility and inclusion across sectors, and aligning national action with the CRPD, the Conclusion clearly signals that the voices and evidence generated by persons with disabilities and research institutions have been heard at the highest level. It provides a strong foundation for transformative, inclusive, and sustainable development and underscores the critical role that development partners can play in supporting the Government of Viet Nam to realise this shared ambition.