Policy Brief

Bridging The Digital Divide: Advancing Accessibility For Persons With Disabilities In Bangladesh's Digital Ecosystem

Prepared by: UNDP Bangladesh and Aspire to Innovate (a2i)

Dhaka, Bangladesh | 2025

Digital Transformation Landscape

Digital technologies help in enabling access of persons with disabilities to essential services, including education, healthcare, banking, and employment.

Over the last decade, Bangladesh has made significant progress in digital transformation:

- 33,000 government websites interconnected
- 1,000+ E-services introduced for public use.

However, 15% of the population living with disabilities remains largely excluded from this revolution.

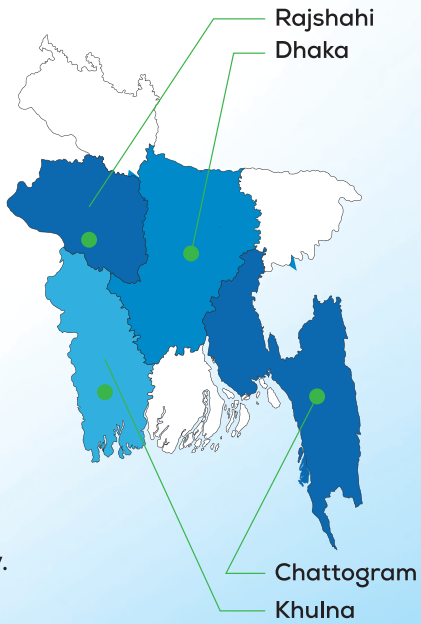
Study Methodology

The study was intended to examine prevailing national disability policies, ICT frameworks, and digital accessibility standards, in addition to evaluating services encompassing e-learning platforms, public service delivery systems, telecommunications, banking platforms, and web accessibility and content access.

Comprehensive Assessment (2025)

A joint study by UNDP and a2i to assess digital accessibility and propose policy solutions. The study adopted a mixed-methods design.

- Desk Review : Prevailing policies & ICT frameworks.
- Consultative Workshops : 4 workshops with 105 participants.
- FGDs : 4 discussions with 35 persons with disabilities.
- KIIs : 8 interviews with UDC entrepreneurs & civil society.
- Survey : 106 persons with disabilities.



Coverage Areas

Study Limitations

Time & Scope

The assessment was carried out within a limited timeframe and scope.

Data Availability

Constrained by a lack of reliable data, which impeded a detailed evaluation of digital inclusion.

Underrepresentation

Individuals with deaf-blindness, psychosocial disabilities, and severe disabilities were underrepresented.

Key Barriers to Digital Inclusion

The government has introduced several e-services as part of the digitalization initiative. Nonetheless, persons with disabilities face persistent challenges due to inaccessible platforms and incompatible assistive technologies. Common barriers include:

01. Limited Access to Assistive Technologies
02. Digital Literacy & Safety Barriers
03. Inaccessible Digital Services & Content
04. Gendered Digital Exclusion
05. Weak Implementation of Inclusive Policies

1. Limited Access to Assistive Technologies

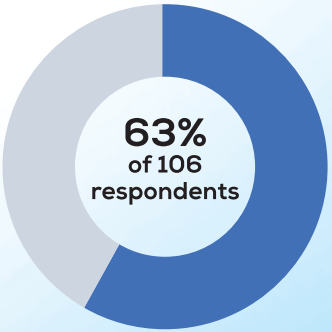
Connectivity Gap

Only 4% of persons with disabilities use mobile internet, compared to 27% of persons without disabilities.

"I cannot buy a SIM card because my disability prevents me from providing fingerprints."

– Participant, Dhaka Consultative Workshop

Usage of Assistive Tech



- Use Assistive Tech (63%)
- Do Not Use (37%), due to affordability

2. Digital Literacy & Safety Barriers

Skills Gap [Among 106 respondents]

- 27.45% cited a need for digital training.
- 16.67% reported a lack of digital proficiency.

Safety Concerns

71.7% reported facing offensive or inaccessible content.

"A woman with a disability encountered cyber harassment when her edited photos were ndecently posted on Facebook. Although her family intervened and confirmed that the photos were fabricated, the incident highlights the critical need for increased awareness of online safety and privacy."

A participant in an FGD in Dhaka

"A participant faced continuous phone calls and text messages from an unknown number after sharing her mobile number at work. The unwanted communication made her uncomfortable, ultimately prompting her to change her mobile SIM card."

-A participant in an FGD in Dhaka

3. Inaccessible Digital Services & Content

E-Learning

Platforms like MuktoPaath offer interactive content but are not yet fully inclusive for all disability groups.

Banking

Biometric authentication methods exclude persons with disabilities who cannot provide fingerprints.

WCAG Compliance

Widespread partial compliance restricts equitable participation.

> "University-level books are rarely accessible digitally."
>
> – FGD Participant, Rajshahi

> "Although we apply for disability allowances online, we are still required to print the application and related documents and submit them offline at the social services office. Despite having online access, we are forced to deal with both online and offline processes, making the online system not very beneficial."
>
> – FGD Participant, Rajshahi

4. Gendered Digital Exclusion

The Gender Gap

Women with disabilities face a double burden of exclusion. Caregivers often lack digital literacy themselves, creating dependency.

Women with disabilities

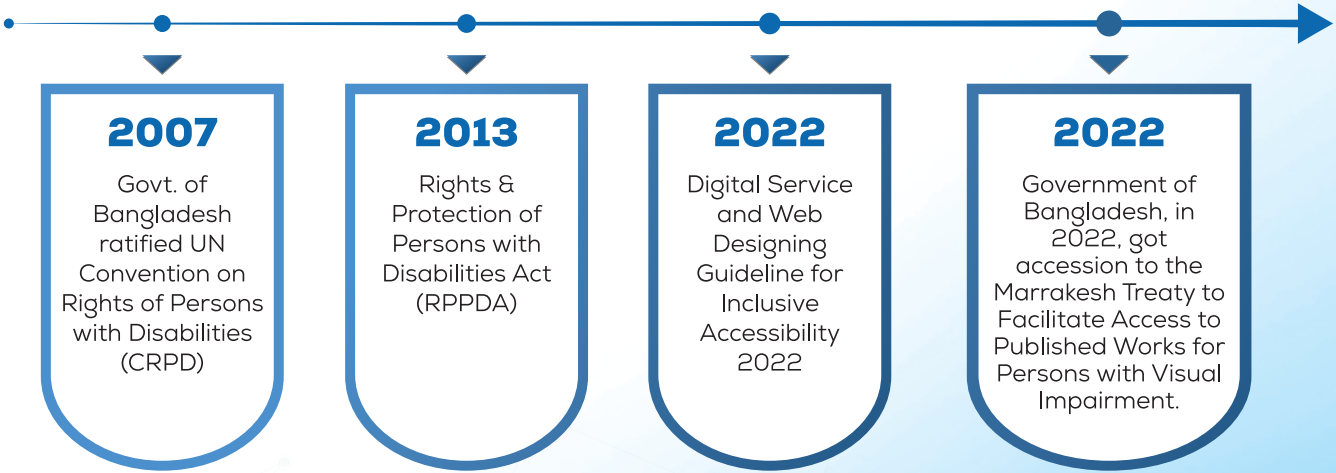
Men with disabilities

"I rely on my daughter-in-law to read messages about my son's disability allowance."

-A participant in an FGD in Dhaka.

5. Weak Implementation of Inclusive Policy

Enforcement Remains Weak & Fragmented



Opportunities for Action

Recommendations
Short-Term (0–1 Year)

Affordable Internet
Launch packages customized for persons with disabilities.

Accessibility Audits
Audit all government digital platforms.

Enforce Guidelines
Implement the 2022 Digital Service & Web Designing Guideline.

Awareness
Promote digital safety and rights awareness.

Capacity Building
Train developers and service providers.

Training Hubs
Create digital skill hubs for women and youth.

Recommendations
Medium-Term (1–3 Years)

Remote Identity
Implement remote verification for government allowances to bypass biometric hurdles.

National Helpline
Establish a helpline with voice, text, and sign language support.

Assistive Tech
Subsidize assistive devices and support local innovation ecosystems.

Suborno Card
Integrate the Suborno Card with national ID systems to streamline service access.

Accessible Banking
Ensure interfaces meet standards and address diverse disability requirements.

Recommendations
Long-Term (3-5 Years)

Digital Accessibility Act

Enact comprehensive legislation fully aligned with **WCAG 2.2 standards** and the international **CRPD framework** to mandate compliance.

Inclusive E-Learning

Ensure all employment and skills platforms—specifically **MuktoPaath** and **NISE**-are fully accessible to persons with disabilities.

Monitoring Authority

Establish a dedicated Web Accessibility Monitoring Authority under the ICT Division to ensure sustained enforcement and oversight.

Universal Media Access

Guarantee equitable access to mass media, Public Service Announcements (PSAs), and **emergency alerts** for all citizens.

Conclusion

By addressing the digital divide, persons with disabilities can be empowered for meaningful participation. Implementing these measures will advance the country toward an accessible digital ecosystem that leaves no one behind.