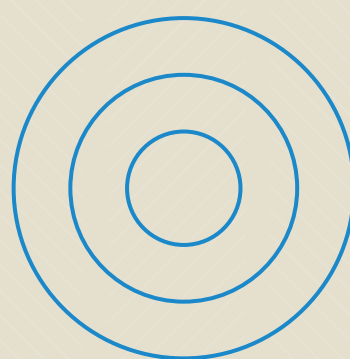
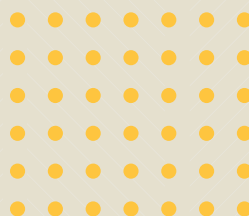




CHANGEMAKING WITHOUT BARRIERS



ASHOKA'S INSIGHTS IN THE FIELD OF DISABILITIES

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Since 2024, Ashoka and The Seneca Trust have been collaborating to strengthen the field of Disability in Social Entrepreneurship. Over the past two years, we have conducted global nomination campaigns that resulted in **more than 10 new Ashoka Fellows working in this field, as well as over 450 nominations of social entrepreneurs around the world.**

As we conclude the second year of this partnership — dedicated to co-creating a world without barriers to full participation and changemaking for the good of all — **Ashoka and The Seneca Trust are delighted to launch this report. It shares the patterns identified through the analysis of the strategies and innovations of Ashoka Fellows working in the field of disability, as well as the gaps and opportunities for collaboration.**

Our gratitude goes to:

- Deborah Gundle and all members of The Seneca Trust, for their partnership, trust, and continued support.
- Ashoka's Leadership Team and Board, for believing in the importance of this initiative and publicly acknowledging the value of this partnership.
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- All local Search and Selection colleagues, who reviewed nominations, conducted interviews, and welcomed new Ashoka Fellows in the field of disability.
- Ashoka Fellows such as Lizzie Kiama, Ryan Gersava, and Marta Gil, for their support and guidance throughout this partnership.
- Former colleagues, such as Georg Schoen and Alex Vesey, who also brought their energy and heart to this partnership.

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Layout: Ricardo Sanches Tomazoli, with support and review by Tito Spinola.



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INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization estimates that 1.3 billion people, approximately 16% of the global population, live with a significant disability today. Yet, persons with disabilities continue to face structural and systemic barriers, including stigma, discrimination, and limited access to basic needs, which keep them on the margins of society.

Aligned with Ashoka's vision of building an Everyone a Changemaker World – a world where every individual has the opportunities, experiences, and resources to recognize their agency and contribute to the good of all – Ashoka Fellows working in the field of disability play a critical role. These leading social entrepreneurs drive systemic change across regions and sectors, dismantling systemic barriers that hinder full participation for persons with disabilities, and replacing these with societal mechanisms and resources that encourage everyone to realize that they are powerful contributors to positive change.

For decades, Ashoka Fellows have revolutionized work and advocacy in the field of Disabilities. Their work demonstrates the benefits of tackling problems with a systemic approach – that is, viewing these issues as interconnected elements that directly and indirectly influence how persons with disabilities are perceived and treated, as well as addressing the obstacles constructed between them and the full practice of their agency and rights. (See Appendices 1-2 for more information on how Ashoka Fellows are elected.)

In partnership with The Seneca Trust, Ashoka has analyzed the work of Fellows impacting the disability field across continents and sectors. This report highlights their strategies and innovations, as well as the gaps and

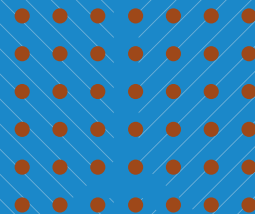
opportunities that must be addressed to achieve a fully accessible and inclusive world. It offers an overview of the breadth and scope of Ashoka Fellows' work in disability, mapping their innovations and strategies across dimensions critical for systemic and paradigmatic shifts. It also identifies gaps and opportunities, along with actionable recommendations for allies across sectors to support Fellows' impact and foster collaboration among these social entrepreneurs. By organizing and connecting these insights, we aim to build collective intelligence and strengthen a global ecosystem that prioritizes inclusion and accessibility everywhere.

In the fourth segment of Chapter Two (2.4), we elaborate how Ashoka Fellows institutionalize mechanisms that guide broader society to value the whole Personhood of persons with disabilities. We also highlight the common threads across diverse interventions – such as systemic, collaborative, and multi-sectoral innovative approaches that address interrelated issues like education, health, and gender equality etc. Chapter Two provides a detailed mapping of these relationships.

In succeeding chapters, we present a fuller picture of Ashoka Fellows' work in Disabilities by recommending developments and opportunities that can further scale their impact and strengthen collaboration among them. We put forward calls to action for every social actor so that everyone can co-create bridges between communities of persons with disabilities and an Everyone a Changemaker World.



MAPPING ASHOKA FELLOWS AND THEIR IMPACT



For over 40 years, Ashoka has identified and supported almost 4,000 leading social entrepreneurs who drive inclusive, systemic, and creative solutions worldwide. Around 1 out of 15 of these Fellows (7%) focus on communities of persons with disabilities, and 72 of them recognize themselves as part of this community.

Mapping these inspiring changemakers and their impact is a useful process in understanding the current landscape of systems change in the field of Disability, as well as the gaps and opportunities for scaling these existing solutions and introducing new innovations.

To this end, we have utilized the combined power of human and artificial intelligence. An artificial intelligence (AI) tool called “Cartographer” was developed by Ashoka’s AI Lab. Cartographer analyzed the profiles of 252 Ashoka Fellows working in the field of Disability created from 1980 to 2025 and clustered similarities among them, pulling from thousands of relevant data points and connections. Members of Ashoka’s Canopy Team then streamlined data entries to verify and refine the Cartographer’s results.

The Ashoka Fellow profile is a publicly available biography of the social entrepreneur and their impact, divided into four segments: the Problem they are solving, the New Idea that introduces an innovation to solve the problem, the Strategies the Fellow uses to carry out the idea, and the Person’s personal and professional background. The profile is written by the Venture team of the country that selected the Fellow, with inputs from senior global reviewers who have experience screening Fellow candidates. The information on the profile also reflects the work that the Fellows were doing at the time of their election.

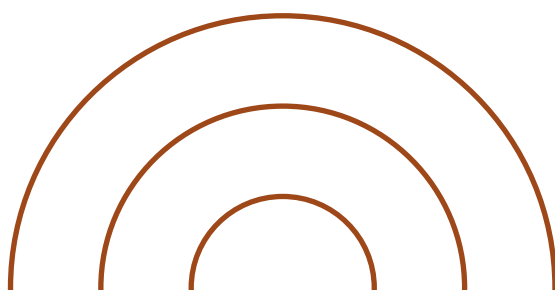
We acknowledge that many concepts in the field of Disability are socially constructed and defined. For the purposes of this report, we use the definition of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:

“Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”

(Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006)

Figure 5 presents a summary of the different disabilities we identified from Ashoka Fellows’ work.

This chapter presents an executive summary of the information collected.



I. The Current Landscape of Disability Work among Ashoka Fellows

Total Number of Ashoka Fellows mapped: 252.

Figure 1.

Decade Elected	Number of Fellows
1980 - 1989	3
1990 - 1999	40
2000 - 2009	89
2010 - 2019	93
2020 - 2025	27

Figure 2.

Continent	Number of Fellows
Africa	28
Asia	80
Europe	68
North America	34
South America	42

Figure 3. Countries with the most Fellows working in Disabilities

Country	Number of Fellows
India	33
Brazil	22
United States of America	19
Hungary	11
Indonesia	11

Figure 4. Number of Fellows with Lived Experiences of Disabilities

Types of Disabilities	Number of Fellows
Mobility disabilities or wheelchair users	26
Blindness or low vision	22
Neurodivergent, cognitive, and learning disabilities	15
Other disabilities (e.g., Deaf community, chronic illnesses)	11

Figure 5. Types of Disabilities Covered by Fellows' Work

Types of Disabilities	Number of Fellows
Cognitive, neurological, and psychosocial disabilities	118
Learning, intellectual, and developmental disabilities	67
Blindness or low vision	62
Mobility disabilities and wheelchair users	55
Deafness or hard-of-hearing	44
Autism	36
Chronic physical health conditions	34
Congenital or hereditary conditions	11
Speech and communication disabilities	11
People with substance use-related disabilities	11
Trauma-related psychosocial disabilities	10
Disabilities acquired through injury or occupational exposure	5
General disability (no explicit target)	9

II. Intersecting Issues

Mapping the work of Fellows in Disability reveals intriguing overlaps between different personal and social (i.e., human) dimensions. Analyzing these creates more context for the various sociopolitical factors that directly impact the quality of life of persons with disabilities.

Many of the partner communities of Ashoka Fellows in the field of Disability are subjected to multiple and intersecting systems of marginalization. Some of these overlapping identities are related to gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, socioeconomic status, age, and indigenous backgrounds.

Figure 6. Intersectional Backgrounds of Communities Engaged

Intersecting Backgrounds	Number of Fellows
Children & Youth	151
People experiencing poverty or socio-economic hardship	104
Gender	74
People residing in rural or remote areas	43
Older people	37
Racial, ethnic, and other cultural identity groups	26
Immigrant and refugee communities	18
Religious and faith communities	10
People currently or formerly incarcerated	8
Survivors of violence or conflict	6
Single parents	6
Indigenous People	5
Body size	1

Most Fellows who are working in Disability are also catering to the needs of children and the youth in their partner communities. 100 or roughly 40% of these Fellows have at least one intervention linked with children & youth and education, which often manifests as innovative curricula and learning tools that can be used by children who are excluded from traditional schooling systems.

According to UNICEF, there are an estimated 93 to 150 million children with disabilities. However, even the agency gives a disclaimer that these are rough estimates due to a lack of empirical studies. Regardless, this underscores the urgency of the issue. Ashoka Fellows have observed the barriers to accessible education such as inadequate teacher training, lack of inclusive methodologies, social stigma, insufficient resources, and the resulting social isolation and diminished opportunities for affected children and their families. Furthermore, youth with disabilities who remain illiterate in adolescence face limited opportunities for further education and employment (Eide & Kamaleri, 2009; Singal, Bhatti & Malik, 2011).

As a result, many Ashoka Fellows champion novel, systemic approaches to inclusive education for children with disabilities, blending technology, community engagement, behavioral science, and customized curricula. Their distinctive focus is on transforming traditional special education through integration, empowerment, and scalable solutions that foster social inclusion and lifelong development.

III. Innovations & Strategies Used

Figure 7. Collaborations with Sectors

Sectors	Number of Fellows
Civil sector & Citizen networks	187
Families (especially Parents)	144
Government	143
Education & Academe	137
Health & Medical	107
Private	96
Caregivers	70
Media	67
Legal	19
Religion	8
Transportation	3
Nature/Environment	2
Tourism	1

Figure 8 summarizes the different methods and innovations that Ashoka Fellows in Disability deployed at the time of their election. A more detailed description of each item is outlined in Appendix 4.

Figure 8. Strategies Ashoka Fellows in Disabilities deployed at the time of their election

Strategies	Number of Fellows
Capacity-Building and Training	151
Policy and Legal Advocacy	134
Curricula, Knowledge Products, or New Models	127
Media & Awareness Campaigns	127
Therapy, Rehabilitation, and Counselling	108
Establishment of a Physical Facility	95
Economic Opportunities (beyond employment)	91
Employment Opportunities	75
Digital Tools & Platforms	75
Research & Data	64
Medical or Health Services	58
Language & Communications Accessibility	50
Integration with Persons without Disabilities	49
Recreation & Leisure	39
Physical Tools & Aids	35
Arts & Creativity	34
Community Service & Volunteering	33
Certifications, Accreditations, and Awards	30
Physical Accessibility	18
Housing	16
Legal Aid	7

Patterns in Ashoka Fellows' Work

Across generations, geographies, and diverse contexts, Ashoka Fellows' systemic impact in the field of Disability demonstrates powerful commonalities that provide a blueprint for mainstreaming accessibility. While the communities and methods of these innovators are varied and highly nuanced, they all put forward a strategy of making an Everyone a Changemaker world a reality that has the following aspects:

a. Changemaking creates more changemakers

The work of Ashoka Fellows operates at a deep level that ensures that change is long-lasting. Systems are not only changed, but individuals are transformed as well. People who work with Ashoka Fellows are often encouraged to exercise decision-making and leadership, moving from a mental and cultural model of dependency into one of agency and self-determination. Ashoka Fellows also upskill communities so that they can achieve financial self-sufficiency and meet their basic needs.

As demonstrated in Figure 8, the most common strategies that Ashoka Fellows working in Disability employ shed light on how they approach scaling systemic change. First, 197 or 78% of these Fellows provide capacity-building or training to their partner communities, most commonly to persons with disabilities but also to the individuals who support them, such as parents and teachers.

Through capacity-building and training, new knowledge and skills are shared with individuals who bear the brunt of systemic barriers. This category tag also encompasses mentorship offerings by Fellows' organizations, which provide personalized and specific plans for self-development. New curricula, knowledge products, and even models for learning and beyond similarly provide innovative ways for persons with disabilities to access educa-

tional resources when traditional pedagogy has had barriers to access. Half or 50% of Fellows working in Disabilities have work tagged under this category. The prevalence of this strategy can partially be attributed to Ashoka's criteria of being able to identify a new idea when electing social entrepreneurs as Ashoka Fellows.

Fellows often employ consistent programs with multiple iterations and/or follow a train-the-trainers model to reach more persons with disabilities and their communities of support. This is a deliberate instance of Scaling Out, where a model is replicated to multiply the amount of people impacted by it. These strategies often entail the transference of Ashoka Fellows' mission or vision while equipping participants with the practical skills to enact them.

On the other hand, another effective and common strategy that Fellows in Disability use is advocating for the passing or implementation of laws. 134 or 53% of Fellows in Disability recognize that their efforts can reap long-term benefits if support for persons with disabilities is codified into policies, regulations, and other legal mandates. (See Laws, Regulations, and Policies in Section 2.4.) These changes to the legal structure of society ensure that states and other powerful institutions recognize the urgency of persons with disabilities accessing essential resources and services, beyond time-bound agreements or the efforts of a single individual. This is an example of Scaling Up or codifying innovations into law, policy, and institutions.

A third way of scaling is to Scale Deep. While external changes may happen, they will not take root if hearts and minds are not changed. In fact, Scaling Deep is an essential component of systems change work that is more difficult to measure but has transformative impact. Ashoka Fellow Tatiana Fraser defines it as a scale "that values the slow steady work of deepening relationships. It recognizes the significance of context, building connections that bridge diverse communities, and it prioritizes inner work

and healing as integral components of the scaling process.” (See Cultural in Section 2.4)

127 or 50% of Fellows enact part of their Scaling Deep work in the form of media or awareness campaigns. They recognize that traditional and contemporary media channels, events, showcases, roadshows, fora, and symposia are valuable platforms that draw more allies to their causes. Storytelling is a particularly powerful method to mainstream the plight of persons with disabilities because they are humanized and become more familiar, especially to those who do not have the lived experience of disability. Narratives and voices that are not heard every day are brought to the forefront and shed light on ignorance and destigmatize disability. This fostering of empathy and connection allows audiences to understand that the issues of inaccessibility and inequity are not merely theoretical but are real and human.

Victoria Shocrón, founder of **DISCAR** in Argentina, has pioneered an approach that uses art and media to transform public perceptions of disability. In a society where disability is often associated with dependency and charity, Victoria reframes the narrative by showcasing talent and creativity. Through free workshops in dance, drama, and music therapy, she empowers children and youth with disabilities to express themselves and build confidence. These stories are then amplified through a cable television program that reaches millions, presenting persons with disabilities as capable and inspiring rather than limited. Victoria also mobilizes celebrities so that inclusion becomes a cultural conversation, not a niche issue. Her approach has shifted societal attitudes from pity to pride and opened real pathways for economic and social participation for people with disabilities.



VICTORIA SHOCRÓN
Ashoka Fellow since 1995
 **Argentina**

For more details on her work, [visit her Ashoka Profile](#).

b. Collaborations across all sectors multiply impact

// *Rather than viewing the value chain as a linear structure, in which value flows from one set of stakeholders to another, [Ashoka Fellows] are redefining the value chain as a web of interwoven sectors.*

Together, this web of players can make holistic change more feasible for all.”
("Fabric of Change," Ashoka and C&A Foundation)

Ashoka Fellows never work in isolation. On the contrary, they are effective connectors who mobilize changemakers across sectors and fields and harmonize efforts to maximize impact for the communities they serve. In the context of this report, Ashoka Fellows do not view Disability as an isolated issue but rather as the convergence of several health, human rights, educational, environmental, and cultural issues.

Figure 7 gives an overview of the social sectors that most commonly collaborate with Ashoka Fellows working in the field of Disability. Work with the families of persons with disabilities figures into 57% of Fellows. Families are within the immediate surroundings of persons with disabilities and are often their primary caregivers (McDaniel & Pisani, 2012).

One common initiative that Fellows lead is organizing families and parents into support networks so they can share resources and co-lead solutions. This strategy extends to convening networks of professionals such as educators, medical practitioners, lawyers, etc. Coalition or network building also commonly involves other organizations, often non-government or nonprofit in nature, who are already mission-aligned. 74% of Fellows take this route.

Government comes in third at 57%. This is directly connected with the data point of 53% of Fellows using policy and legal advocacy to utilize laws and other legal mandates to secure institutional support for persons with disabilities. Long-term relationships with public officials and consistent lobbying are essential in executing such a strategy.

Education and health sectors round out the most engaged sectors at 54% and 42% respectively. Problems such as lack of accessible services and the exclusion of persons with disabilities from mainstream society are present in many Fellows' profiles. When intersected with Fellows' strategies and innovations (Figure 8), capacity-building and/or training, as well as the introduction of new knowledge and models, are methods through which Fellows equip professionals who have a strong influence on the quality of life of persons with disabilities.

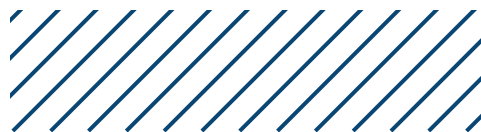
The data clearly points to partnerships as a proven method of scaling social impact, and all Fellows mobilize multiple sectors simultaneously. In fact, 100% of Fellows work with partners who belong to at least 2 of the sectors in Figure 7.

Fellows are deliberate in the creation, nourishment, and growth of changemaking networks where values, rules, economic incentives, disincentives, and the ways a society organizes itself reinforce a world where everyone can contribute. Collective action, rather than individual heroism, is the way forward to broader inclusion.

c. An intersectional lens finds often overlooked systemic issues

In relation to the previous point of multi-sectoral collaboration, Ashoka Fellows in the field of Disability approach it with an intersectional lens. In other words, they are aware that multiple systems of marginalization can intertwine and become indistinguishable from one another. However, these invisible interconnections lead to real and dire effects for Persons with Disabilities who come from multiple backgrounds and identities that have been historically marginalized.

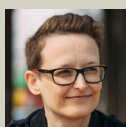
Ashoka Fellows recognize that disability often compounds with other social markers to create unique challenges and are thus motivated to design solutions that address these overlapping forms of exclusion.



For example, Ashoka Fellow **Ewa Furgał** has identified the problem of a lack of autism diagnoses for women and non-binary people mainly because of the widespread belief that men are more likely to be on the spectrum. She launched the first self-advocacy civil society organization in Poland focused on gender aspects of the autism spectrum called “**Girls on the Spectrum.**”

Ewa integrates gender dimensions into autism advocacy by highlighting the unique experiences of women, transgender, and nonbinary individuals on the spectrum. She promotes both professional and self-diagnosis, especially for women who are often overlooked, and creates inclusive self-help groups where participants share lived experiences. Her initiatives include mentoring programs like “Professional Friendship,” tailored for women on the spectrum to support career development, and she trains professionals to be gender-sensitive in their approach. Ewa also influences media portrayals and policy, ensuring that neurodiverse women and nonbinary people are seen as contributors to society, not just recipients of care.

In 2016, Ewa emerged as the pioneering figure to initiate scholarly discourse on the intersection of gender and autism in Poland. She was the first to systematically address gender-related dimensions of autism in academic publications. Although the body of literature on this subject has since expanded, Ewa continues to be recognized as a leading authority in the field, both nationally and across Europe.



EWA FURGAŁ

Ashoka Fellow since 2022

 **Poland**

For more details on her work, [visit her Ashoka Profile.](#)

Therefore, a clear pattern of the principle “Nothing about us without us” emerges. In other words, rather than designing for people with disabilities, Ashoka Fellows design with them. They engage users in co-creation processes, ensuring that solutions reflect real needs and preferences.

In Nigerian society, individuals affected by leprosy endure intense stigma. Even after being cured, many remain in leper colonies due to ongoing social rejection. Ashoka Fellow **Innocent Uworibhor** is working to reintegrate these individuals into society while also fostering societal acceptance. His initiative, **African Hope**, is the first locally-led effort in Nigeria addressing leprosy-related issues, with a strong focus on involving former lepers in both planning and implementation.

Innocent began his work in the Benin colony in southwest Nigeria by distributing food and essentials with help from friends, but after seeing little progress, he shifted focus to more sustainable solutions. He secured permission from local authorities to improve housing for former lepers, raising funds to renovate two buildings into hostels and involving residents in the labor to reduce costs and build self-worth. He then encouraged former lepers to develop cooperative societies to facilitate their reintegration and gain access to financial support and education in vocational skills, marketing, human rights, and health awareness.

A national committee dedicated to the rehabilitation of former lepers is being established, with Innocent’s organization playing a central role. Through this committee, officials from colonies implementing his model will regularly convene to exchange insights and experiences on its application and progress.

INNOCENT UWORIBHOR

Ashoka Fellow since 2001

 **Nigeria**

For more details on his work, [visit his Ashoka Profile.](#)

d. Nothing about us without us

Ashoka Fellows understand that their efforts will be toothless despite good intentions if the communities they are designing solutions for are not involved in the process.

e. Universal Design creates inclusion

/// *Universal Design (UD) is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability. An environment (or any building, product, or service in that environment) should be designed to meet the needs of all people who wish to use it. This is not a special requirement, for the benefit of only a minority of the population. It is a fundamental condition of good design."*

(About Universal Design," Centre for Excellence in Universal Design)

More than reinventing disability-specific accommodations, Ashoka Fellows are reimagining systems, environments, and services to be inherently inclusive, benefiting not only people with disabilities but society as a whole.

Designing for All Abilities

Ashoka Fellows are creating products, services, and environments that are usable by people with a wide range of abilities, without the need for adaptation. Whether it's inclusive educational tools, accessible housing, or universally designed public spaces, their work ensures that everyone can participate fully and independently.

Shifting from Segregation to Integration

Many initiatives challenge traditional models of institutionalization or segregation by promoting inclusive education, employment, and community living. This shift reflects a core tenet of universal design: environments should be designed to accommodate everyone from the outset, not retrofitted after the fact.

Promoting Independence and Choice

A key goal of universal design is to enhance autonomy. Ashoka Fellows' solutions are designed to give individuals more control over their lives, reducing dependency and increasing participation.

IV. Self-Correcting Decision-Making Architecture: A Model for Systems Change

/// *What we mean by this term is a robust guideline that nudges everyone who picks it up – the social innovator, the CEO of a company, the young person building a venture – towards making the right choices in their respective field, to avoid humanity gets harmed, intentionally or not."*

(Konstanze Frischen, former Vice-President of Ashoka)

Ashoka's "Everyone a Changemaker" vision requires an interconnected and purpose-driven community of changemakers and organizations that are able to shift the environments where people interact and engage with one another.

To envision shifting full ecosystems, Ashoka designed an Ecosystem Architecture framework on decision-making, rules and incentives, values, information flows, and safeguards. It is based on understanding the dynamics of seven systems that interact and influence one another in any ecosystem.

When applied to the field of Disability, these interconnected systems can look like the following:

- Legal and regulatory policies that define and protect the rights of persons with disabilities;
- Economic incentives and new markets for accessibility-related products and services;
- Political activities such as organizing and lobbying that respect persons with disabilities as decision makers;
- Cultural and mental frameworks, including language that champion the agency and recognize the whole personhood of persons with disabilities;
- Organizational pushes by social institutions to normalize inclusive practices and provide persons with disabilities tools to gain upward social mobility;
- Accessible technologies that bridge the gaps between persons with disabilities and their full participation in society.

The Self-Correcting Decision-Making Architecture (SCDMA) is a framework composed of a concerted series of instruments that guide millions of decisions in the direction of a stated purpose. It is not static, but rather “self-corrects” towards the goal of the common good.

How are Ashoka Fellows creating mechanisms in society that self-correct towards the systematic inclusion of Persons with Disabilities? The following case studies illustrate their tangible strategies and methods, categorized under the SCDMA systems.

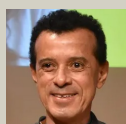
Laws, Regulations & Policies

Many Ashoka Fellows strive to make change sustainable by embedding disability rights and inclusion into the very fabric of legal systems, mainly through effective lobbying, advocacy, and collaborations with governments. In this way, laws, regulations, and policies provide mandates for institutions that wield great power and resources to act in the interests of persons with disabilities.

Roberval Tavares addresses the systemic barriers people with disabilities face in tourism, especially nature tourism, due to inadequate infrastructure, prejudice, and weak enforcement of accessibility laws. He founded **Consorcio de Turismo Inclusivo de las Américas (CONTURIA)**, a regional consortium that promotes accessibility standards, trains stakeholders, and advocates for policies to scale inclusive tourism across Latin America.

He advises the Salvadoran Tourism Institute, which manages 17 national parks, with 5 sites already assessed and 15 more planned. In Costa Rica, he partners with Pérez Zeledón to implement the first canton-wide accessibility strategy, developed in 2021 with nine NGOs, four public institutions, and 36 tourism businesses.

Roberval is also pushing national laws in Costa Rica and El Salvador requiring accessibility audits for tourism enterprises before registration; proposals are already in Congress and under drafting with legislative bodies.



ROBERVAL TAVARES

Ashoka Fellow since 2022



Costa Rica

For more details on his work, [visit his Ashoka Profile](#).

Tulika Das confronts a paradox at the heart of India's development system: despite a legal framework reserving 3% of poverty alleviation grants for people with disabilities, the vast majority goes unused — because government programs routinely treat disability as a specialized medical matter, separate from mainstream development. Through her organization **Sanchar**, she uses the Disability Act of 1995 as a legal lever to embed disability inclusion into existing programs and engages local councils to unlock underutilized grants mandated by law.

Her advocacy has produced concrete policy shifts: women with disabilities are now formally included in the annual conference of the National Commission of Women's Work in West Bengal, and her lobbying contributed to the Indian government including disability in the national census for the first time in over 30 years — making people with disabilities visible in the data that drives resource allocation across the country.



TULIKA DAS

Ashoka Fellow since 2004



India

For more details on her work, [visit her Ashoka Profile](#).

Economic

Persons with disabilities encounter countless barriers when accessing their basic needs. Ashoka Fellows encourage persons with disabilities to practice their agency by creating environments and programs that assist them in achieving economic independence and employability.

Micaela Connery of **The Kelsey** is creating disability-forward housing that expands access to affordable homes and opportunities for all. People with and without disabilities live together and are supported by an onsite Inclusion Concierge who coordinates care, manages emergencies, and fosters social connections through events and Circles of Support.

Buildings feature standard accessibility elements such as ramps, elevators, daylight optimization, and design for community interaction, such as shared spaces and gathering-friendly hallways. Some units include two bedrooms for live-in caregivers, and all sites are located near transit and health services for convenience.



MICAELA CONNERY

Ashoka Fellow since 2024



United States

For more details on her work, [visit her Ashoka Profile](#).

Ryan Gersava of **Virtualahan** employs a highly replicable impact model designed to meet the diverse needs of individuals from marginalized backgrounds, equipping them with both the skills and mindset necessary to thrive in the digital economy.

To achieve this, Ryan integrates several strategies. First, he empowers participants by providing training in high-demand digital skills, opening pathways to greater economic participation and security. Second, recognizing that skill-building alone is insufficient, he addresses the deep-seated trauma within these communities through well-being sessions, life coaching, and community-building activities. These initiatives are introduced during job-skills training and sustained by alumni networks long after graduation. Third, Ryan collaborates with employers to boost demand for hiring persons with disabilities and to foster inclusive practices and environments that are more responsive to socially excluded populations.



RYAN GERSAVA

Ashoka Fellow since 2019



Philippines

For more details on his work, [visit his Ashoka Profile](#).

Political Participation and Influence

Many Ashoka Fellows strive to make change sustainable by embedding disability rights and inclusion into the very fabric of legal systems, mainly through effective lobbying, advocacy, and collaborations with governments. In this way, laws, regulations, and policies provide mandates for institutions that wield great power and resources to act in the interests of persons with disabilities.

In 1989, **Monsur Ahmed Choudhuri** founded the **National Forum of Organizations Working with the Disabled**, now a 123-member apex body representing all disability sectors.

He observed that disability laws were largely symbolic due to bureaucratic rules. With all responsibilities placed under the Social Welfare Ministry, which lacks authority and capacity, other ministries avoid involvement. Through roles on national committees, Monsur engages top policymakers to expose these structural flaws and advocate for change.

He is also driving a national agenda to integrate disability issues into mainstream development organizations and has launched a campaign urging the World Bank to include disability in its Poverty Reduction Strategy framework.



MONSUR AHMED CHOUDHURI

Ashoka Fellow since 2002



Bangladesh

For more details on his work, [visit his Ashoka Profile](#).

Cultural

As creative innovators, many Ashoka Fellows use multi-disciplinary approaches to mainstream the advocacy of persons with disabilities. By using the arts, media, cultural practices, and other storytelling tools, these social entrepreneurs are reframing the narratives that surround Disability.

Olivier-Hugues Terreault of **Teatro do Sopro** employs an innovative form of clowning therapy to nurture the emotional and social skills of older adults, particularly those living with dementia or Alzheimer's. His approach adapts to each individual's responses, allowing seniors to maintain a sense of control over their environment. Depending on the stage of dementia, communication may occur through sounds, rhythms, or even breathing. Olivier creates a space where imagination and play are encouraged, helping to reduce stress and anxiety.

To extend this impact, Olivier has developed lectures and an educational program that equip actors and caregivers with tools to communicate effectively with elderly individuals. By fostering relationships that see seniors as people rather than just patients, treatment and acceptance become more meaningful.

Through his interventions, Olivier has directly benefited 16,000 seniors in long-term care facilities, along with their families and healthcare professionals.



OLIVIER-HUGUES TERREAUULT
Ashoka Fellow since 2014
 **Brazil**

For more details on his work, [visit his Ashoka Profile](#).

Gina Badenoch of **Ojos que Sienten** (Sight of Emotion) challenges assumptions about what people with disabilities can achieve. Her organization uses photography and sensory experiences to shift perceptions among both blind and sighted individuals about human potential.

Though photography may seem unlikely for someone blind, Gina teaches participants to direct their subjects verbally while framing shots. She guides them from self-doubt to confidence, taking them into public spaces like parks to encourage interaction and integration.

Sight of Emotion has held four exhibitions in Mexico and one in England, each attracting 50,000–60,000 visitors, with the largest drawing 465,000 at Mexico City's Papalote Children's Museum. These events foster dialogue between blind photographers and sighted audiences.



GINA BADENOCH
Ashoka Fellow since 2008
 **Mexico**

For more details on her work, [visit her Ashoka Profile](#).

Markus Raivio challenges the narrative that a person's diagnosis defines their identity and limits their potential. Through **Culture Houses** — "diagnosis-free" spaces where people with severe mental health challenges come together as creators rather than patients — he reframes how both professionals and society talk about mental health. The model spans 16 Culture Houses across Finland and Sweden, reaching more than 2,000 clients each year, with nearly 60% eventually enrolling in vocational school or finding a job.



MARKUS RAIVIO
Ashoka Fellow since 2022
 **FINLAND**

For more details on his work, [visit his Ashoka Profile](#).

Organizational

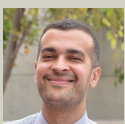
a. Innovations to Education

Almost half of all Fellows working in Disability have been identified as collaborating with the Education sector, specifically partner schools, universities, teachers' organizations, and other academic institutions.

Fellows have identified that status quo education, especially early to elementary education, have been exclusionary to children who require accommodations due to insufficient knowledge and tools in places of learning, as well as stigma. To combat this, Fellows employ a range of work covers co-development of inclusive curriculum and academic policies, teacher trainings, and innovative tools and knowledge products.

Mohamed Zariat of Tibu Maroc applies a holistic four-part strategy that combines sports training with a self-development program, parent and teacher engagement, and a "train the trainer" model for sustainability. The enhancement program includes counseling, self-worth and career guidance, health and hygiene education, ethics, entrepreneurship skills, and social projects addressing issues like extremism.

In 2015, Mohamed partnered with the Ministry of Education to access public schools and has since opened youth centers nationwide. Since 2011, Tibu Maroc has launched 16 centers in seven regions, reaching 2,000 youth and 3,500 parents, with 50% of participants being girls. In areas where 15% of the population lives on less than \$3 a day, these initiatives are groundbreaking. Mohamed also created Morocco's first basketball academy for youth with reduced mobility to promote inclusion.



MOHAMED ZARIAT
Ashoka Fellow since 2018
 **Morocco**

For more details on his work, [visit his Ashoka Profile](#).

b. Innovations to Healthcare

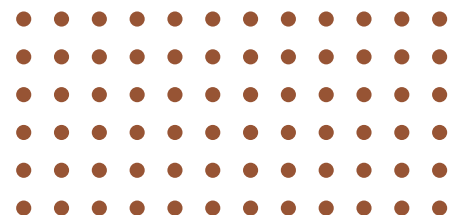
Ashoka Fellows are innovating healthcare through legal advocacy, peer networks, and public education to tackle social determinants, empower patients, and transform public attitudes. Their distinctive approach shifts care from isolated clinical treatment to holistic, community-driven prevention and support, addressing both medical and societal barriers to health. Their distinctive approaches decentralize care, empower patients and caregivers, destigmatize medical conditions, and leverage technology, volunteerism, and innovative financing to make quality support accessible and sustainable for marginalized groups.

Jeesun Lee of Seoul Rehabilitation Hospital has built a compassionate hospital culture centered on empathy. To serve children unable to afford hospitalization, she opened Korea's first children's rehabilitation day ward and secured national insurance coverage for the program, ensuring its sustainability. Since then, over 100 hospitals, including the National Rehabilitation Center, have studied her model. When Jeesun saw the lack of rehabilitation services for adolescents with disabilities, which hindered their education, she created Korea's first dedicated medical team for this age group.



JEESUN LEE
Ashoka Fellow since 2020
 **South Korea**

For more details on her work, [visit her Ashoka Profile](#).



Gregoire Ahongbonon of **La Saint Camille** provides adapted mental health care in Africa to restore dignity to patients marginalized by stigma and taboo. The association's centers in Côte d'Ivoire and Benin are led by experienced psychiatrists who train local staff and collaborate with specialists from West Africa, Europe, and Canada.

To ensure continuity of care, Gregoire established relay clinics run by nuns and built general hospitals to treat physical conditions, serving both patients and local communities. Bouaké's hospital alone sees about 10,000 patients annually and works with the Ministry of Health and the University Hospital Center. He also created a dozen rehabilitation centers offering work and training for autonomy.

Gregoire educates families to dispel myths about mental illness and promotes self-help groups, with former patients becoming advocates for change.



GREGOIRE AHONGBONON

Ashoka Fellow since 2021

 Côte d'Ivoire

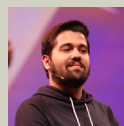
For more details on his work, [visit his Ashoka Profile](#).

Technology

Ashoka Fellows harness the power of technology to bypass the limitations of traditional methods and discover new bridges for persons with disabilities to gain access to their needs. These tools adapt to diverse circumstances and are designed to be used to the greatest extent, regardless of age, ability, and other factors.

Zafer Elcik created **Otsimo**, an app that offers a fun, stress-free environment for children with autism to build essential skills. It helps kids focus on numbers and letters without distraction and also supports learners with Down syndrome and dyslexia. Parents can track progress and assist when needed.

Today, Otsimo has 44,000 registered users, with 16,000 children active monthly. Its website hosts over 100 articles and resources for families, and the team continues to produce easy-to-understand content. Beyond digital tools, more than 1,000 parents and teachers have received autism-and-technology training through partnerships with NGOs and schools.



ZAFER ELCIK

Ashoka Fellow since 2018

 Turkey

For more details on his work, [visit his Ashoka Profile](#).

Andrew Bastawrous and his team at **Peek Vision** developed two core technologies: one for screening vision impairment and another for capturing retinal images via smartphone. These tools make eye health screening, diagnosis, and follow-up simple enough for non-specialists.

With built-in live tracking, Peek identifies gaps where patients fail to receive treatment, enabling health systems to target weak points in the care chain. Peek then partners with providers to close these gaps.

By 2024, Peek Vision had screened 5.3 million people and connected 1 million to needed eye care. The organization operates in 12 countries across Africa and South Asia.



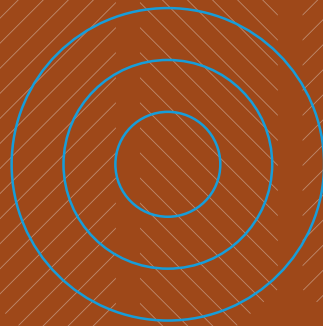
ANDREW BASTAWROUS

Ashoka Fellow since 2017

 United Kingdom

For more details on his work, [visit his Ashoka Profile](#).

GAPS IN THE FIELD



While the 252 Fellows mapped in this report are transforming the field and are pioneering interventions for systemic inclusion, there is still much that can be done in the intersection of social entrepreneurship and disability.

Based on the data presented in the previous chapters, we have identified the following gaps in our current Fellowship as it relates to the field of Disability. These are not only signposts for our work in expanding our Fellowship, but also an invitation to readers to collaborate and co-lead efforts to close the gaps.

I. Match population density with number of Fellows

Across all kinds of important aspects that would benefit from representation, there is an overall need to increase the number of Fellows, including those that work in Disability. With 1.3 billion people with disabilities worldwide (World Health Organization), it is evident that there is much to be done to systemically include persons with disabilities and ensure they have the tools, resources, and enabling environments to improve their lives.

II. Disability as a personal lived experience

Among the 252 Fellows identified in the AI tool, 74 have been identified as having disabilities at least once in their life. It is important to note that these were self-declared at the time of their election as Fellows. The number excludes any individuals who have chosen not to disclose any conditions.

The fact that only 29% of this subset of Fellows self-identify as persons with disabilities underscores how the same systemic barriers that Fellows work to dismantle are the very ones that make it harder for people with disabilities to be recognized and supported as changemakers in the first place.

III. Broader geographic representation for the Fellowship

While Ashoka Fellows working in Disability are already present in 58 countries, there is still an undeniable benefit to broadening the geographic diversity of the Ashoka Fellowship. As illustrated previously in the changemaking pattern or principle of “Nothing about us without us,” it is innovators on-the-ground who best understand local contexts and communities and would be the most equipped to deliver effective solutions.

Ashoka has yet to establish a presence in Australasia, which explains the absence of Ashoka Fellows in the region. Furthermore, there is limited representation from East Asia, Central Asia, Eastern Europe, the Middle East (outside Egypt and Jordan), and Francophone Africa.

Diversifying the Ashoka Fellowship also requires the growth and development of Ashoka, especially if this entails establishing new country offices. We need the invaluable support of funders and partners to mobilize the necessary resources and networks.

IV. Opportunities in other intersectional issues

Some marginalized backgrounds that intersect with disability have presence in some Ashoka Fellows’ work, but in the scheme of this report and considering the compounding challenges at hand, there is an urgency for more social innovators to contribute.

Among these communities, the ones with the lowest representation in Fellows' work are survivors of attacks or conflict (2%), single parents (2%), Indigenous People (2%), and body size (0.4%).

According to the United Nations, Indigenous Peoples may experience disability more than the general population because of several factors that include "higher levels of poverty, increased exposure to environmental degradation, the impact of large projects such as dams or mining activities, and the higher risk of being victims of violence."

V. Opportunities in other sectors

While Ashoka Fellows approach Disability from a diversity of strategies, sectors, and intersecting issue areas, there is still an abundance of opportunity to explore how Disability is impacted by other social systems.

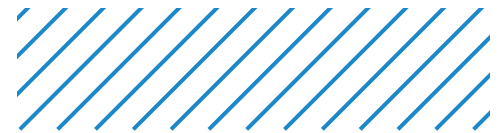
For example, persons with disabilities face multiple vulnerabilities during natural disasters. According to the Handicap International - Humanity & Inclusion (HI), they have increased risk of missing out on humanitarian aid, decreased access to livelihood opportunities, and higher rates of incurring additional health problems.

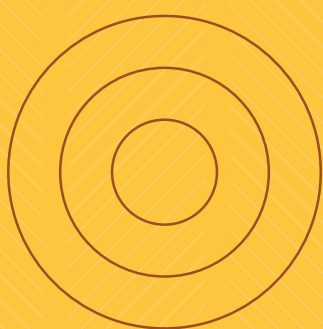
Persons with disabilities who are in the process of migration also experience compounded setbacks. The European Disability Forum cites lack of accessibility to assistance and protection risks, lack of access to medical care, and insufficient access to assistive technology (especially in mobility and communications), and the complex processes of claiming asylum are some of these challenges.

With Ashoka's initiatives in Next Now: Planet & Climate and Hello World, the foundations for cross-systems conversations and collaborations are already laid out. Partners can help these Ashoka teams, as well as Venture and Fellowship teams worldwide, to find new Ashoka Fellows for these communities, while supporting existing ones. Further-

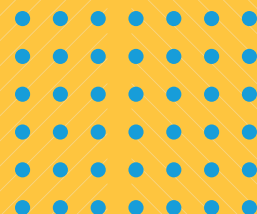
more, the multisectoral ecosystems engaged by these two initiatives can mobilize to address urgent needs.

In conclusion, the collective work of Ashoka Fellows in Disability can only benefit from a broader representation in various aspects. The diversity of the lived experience of persons with disabilities also requires equally diverse and adaptable solutions.





OPPORTUNITIES



There are 1.3 billion people with disabilities worldwide, approximately 1 in 6 individuals. Despite this, only about 2% of total philanthropic giving in the US is directed towards disability-related causes, with a mere 0.1% specifically aimed at disability rights and social justice (Disability & Philanthropy Forum). While 80% of people with disabilities live in developing countries, according to the United Nations, only a small percentage of this already limited funding supports people in those communities.

This stark imbalance highlights the critical need for increased investment in disability-focused initiatives, particularly in underserved regions.

The systemic innovations of Ashoka Fellows have redefined what it means to create long-lasting impact in a field that is fraught with challenges and obstacles. However, they have demonstrated that there are innovative approaches to repair or replace broken systems. This means that it is imperative for the rest of society to enable the further scaling of these efforts. In this chapter, we offer several recommendations on how different and diverse social actors can make their solidarity with persons with disabilities tangible.

I. Adopt a Systems Change Lens in Funding and Partnering for Disability Work

The most important recommendation we offer funders is for them to be partners in the mission of innovators in the Disability field. This entails a long-term and deep relationship with the innovators, without being overly concerned with short-term deliverables.

Unrestricted, long-term funding is ideal for this level of partnership. It affords social innovators the flexibility and safety net to pivot and solve problems agilely as new challenges arise. Systems entrepreneurs are married to a social problem as demonstrated by Ashoka Fellows. They may change their external interventions, but they are at the core, deeply committed to bringing their vision into fruition. Furthermore, the funding becomes strategic because it puts achieving systemic impact at the forefront rather than reporting large numbers for reporting's sake.

Unrestricted funding circumvents the issue of short-sighted funding that ignores how colossal social issues related to Disability must be targeted through various interventions. Isolated aid may not be enough to create a dent.

Aside from financial aid, a highly valuable partnership with systemic entrepreneurs would entail assessing and addressing their specific needs, especially those not covered typically by grants and funds. Partners should take time to understand systemic entrepreneurs' big picture visions and various strategies so that they can have a personal stake in Disability work.

Create Funding Pools to Enable Grassroots Innovations

Many, if not all, Ashoka Fellows create more changemakers through their work as they are aware that collective leadership is the only effective way to change systems. Funders can develop these processes by providing funds that are specific to backing proposals and/or initiatives of grassroots changemakers with disabilities. For example, this can refer to the alumni of Ashoka Fellows' training and/or capacity-building programs who have expressed a real interest in starting their own solutions.

Support Multi-Sectoral Collaborations

Even though all Fellows work with a multi-sectoral approach, specific funding covering this has been rare. Funders can have greater impact with their funding if they support the creation of spaces and events for social innovators to develop relationships and collaborate with changemakers from diverse sectors, fields, and practices (e.g., government, private sector, academe, etc.).

Provide Hands-on Assistance to Social Innovators through Pro-Bono and Volunteer Engagements

Partner organizations and even individuals have their own expertise. Through pro-bono and volunteer engagements with systemic entrepreneurs, partners can contribute their knowledge and skills in a direct manner to cover the gaps in social innovators' work. Assistance can be in any aspect, such as fundraising, marketing, legal advice, etc.

Cover Accessibility Costs of Innovators

Traditional budgets of programs and events often overlook the cost of providing accommodations for a diverse audience. These important accommodations cover all aspects from program design (e.g., compensating persons with disabilities for agenda development and as featured speakers), promotion and communications (e.g., closed captioning, sign language interpretation), venue (e.g., booking places with ramps and elevators), etc. Funders can address these gaps to facilitate the accessibility of systemic innovators' efforts.

II. Implement Laws and Policies that Assist Social Innovators

Decision makers with legislative and executive functions in all levels (international, regional, national, local) should work hand in hand to pass and implement laws that facilitate the work of systemic entrepreneurs. These include:

- **Tax incentives for enterprises employing persons with disabilities or addressing issues of communities of persons with disabilities.**
- **Government funding with a systemic lens to complement private funding.**
- **Easier processes for the legal status and recognition of Disability-focused organizations.**
- **Mandates for inclusive lending practices from banks and finance institutions for Disability-focused organizations.**
- **Mandates that actively involve persons with disabilities in policymaking, program design, and budget decisions.**

- **Mandates that scale Fellows' work by granting them access to the greater public (e.g., integration with school curricula, adoption in government offices, etc.)**

III. Feature Social Innovators and their Systemic Work for Framework Change

Organizations and individuals who have a strong influence on public thinking and perception have a powerful opportunity to co-lead a mindset shift regarding Disability. By reaching more people, systemic entrepreneurs can accelerate the cultural shift towards the mainstream recognition of the rights and agency of persons with disabilities and away from stigmatization and discrimination. Such initiatives can look like the following:

- **Documentary series or films, as well as film festivals and screenings**
- **Digital content, both longform (online/streaming series, podcasts) and shortform (Reels/TikTok series)**
- **Social media campaigns and collaborations with digital influencers and mainstream celebrities**
- **Interviews on news and magazine shows**
- **Feature articles, op-eds, and columns on journalistic platforms**
- **Storytelling events like photo exhibits, TED Talks, theater performances, etc.**

IV. Provide and support opportunities for early volunteerism and exposure to social issues

67 out of 252 (27%) Ashoka Fellows working in Disability report that early exposure to a person with disabilities who is not in their family and/or a volunteering experience has been the pivotal catalyst that sparked their empathy and their desire to address the obstacles that persons with disabilities face. If we include Fellows who report having at least one family member with disabilities, chronic or temporary, the number increases to 96 or 38% of Fellows.

Institutions like schools, government agencies, foundations, private companies and funders can mold more young people into powerful changemakers who can solve problems at their root causes. When conversing with Ashoka teams about their personal changemaking stories, 127 or 50% of Fellows cited made the connection of the impact of their academic background to their life mission.

Specifically, they can create or support existing initiatives that provide children and youth opportunities to be immersed in the lives of people from marginalized communities and experience the positive impact of volunteerism and community service. 33 or 13% of Fellows working in Disability recognize the importance of these opportunities and offer some form of volunteerism or community service through their organization.

In an article by Claire Fallender and Ross Hall, they cite the 2018 Global Fellows Study which reports that “the majority of Ashoka Fellows (65 percent) started their changemaking journey by joining someone else’s social change efforts before the age of 21. What’s more, 48 percent of Fellows actually started and led their own initiatives in their teenage years.”

The Fellows cited their parents and teachers as the most prominent influences in their changemaking trajectories. Being “exposed to a diversity of people, cultures, and experiences” was a key commonality in these early changemaking experiences.

If all institutions and social actors in society prioritize early changemaking, we can help raise future generations of empathetic leaders who are driven by an Everyone a Changemaker vision.

V. Start more collaborations among Fellows

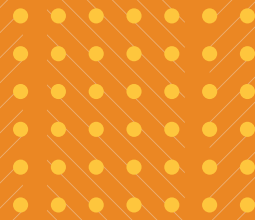
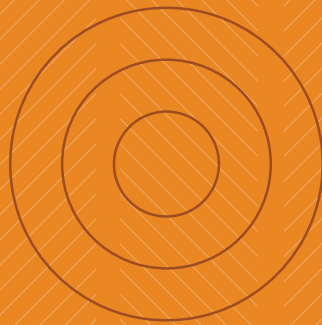
The 252 Fellow profiles mapped in this report contain an abundance of practical wisdom and powerful stories of communities. Their collective impact can be magnified to an exponential degree if they self-organize and mobilize as a unified movement of changemakers. As a joint force, Ashoka Fellows can strengthen their cases for advocacy and share linkages of knowledge and networks to come up with adaptive and coordinated solutions to the complex challenges persons with disabilities face.

Some of these collective efforts can include:

- 1 A sequel to this report, such as joint white paper, where Fellows input their own learnings from decades of work in Disability;**
- 2 A joint, global lobbying/advocacy campaign targeted towards governments around the world and influential organizations such as the United Nations to pass laws and funding towards the urgent challenges of persons with disabilities;**
- 3 A series of sessions where Fellows can get together, learn more about each other’s work, and identify how they can complement their efforts;**
- 4 A series of peer learning sessions where Fellows can teach other scaling strategies and systemic approaches, with an open library of resources for all Fellows;**
- 5 Host multi-sectoral consortiums on the various issues persons with disabilities face.**

While Fellows must intentionally build this movement, the enabling support of allies in the broader ecosystem will expedite this Everyone a Changemaker movement.





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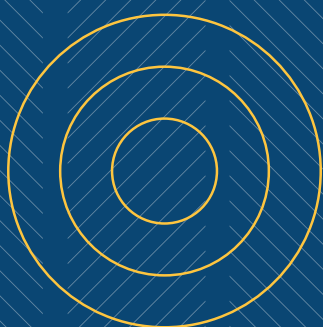
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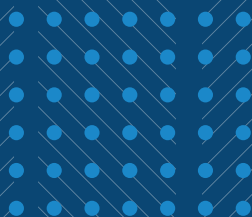
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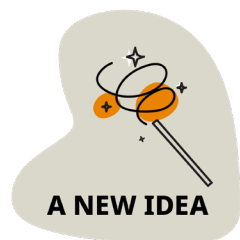


APPENDICES



Appendix 1. Ashoka's Five-Point Criteria for Electing Fellows

Ashoka's selection process is anchored by our five criteria against which all Fellow candidates are evaluated:



New Idea:

Ashoka cannot elect someone to the Fellowship unless he or she is possessed by a new idea—a new solution or approach to a social problem—that will change the pattern in a field, be it human rights, the environment, or any other. We evaluate the idea historically and against its contemporaries in the field, looking for innovation and real change potential.



Creativity:

Successful social entrepreneurs must be creative both as goal-setting visionaries and as problem solvers capable of engineering their visions into reality. Creativity is not a quality that suddenly appears—it is almost always apparent from youth onward. Among the questions we might ask: Does this individual have a vision of how he or she can meet some human need better than it has been met before? Does the candidate have a history of creating other new visions?



Entrepreneurial quality:

Perhaps our most important criterion, entrepreneurial quality is the defining characteristic of first class entrepreneurs. It defines leaders who see opportunities for change and innovation and devote themselves entirely to making that change happen. These leaders often have little interest in anything beyond their mission, and they are willing to spend the next ten to fifteen years making a historical development take place. This total absorption is critical to transforming a new idea into reality, and it is for this reason that Ashoka insists that candidates commit themselves full-time to their ideas during the launch phase.



Social impact of the idea:

This criterion focuses on the candidate's idea, not the candidate. Ashoka is only interested in ideas that it believes will change the field significantly and that will trigger nationwide impact or, for smaller countries, broader regional change. For example, Ashoka will not support the launch of a new school or clinic unless it is part of a broader strategy to reform the education or health system at the national level and beyond.



Ethical fiber:

Social entrepreneurs introducing major structural changes to society have to ask a lot of people to change how they do things. If the entrepreneur is not trusted, the likelihood of success is significantly reduced. Ashoka asks every participant in the selection process to evaluate candidates for these qualities rigorously. To do so often requires one to resort to instinct and gut feelings, not just rational analysis. The essential question is: "Do you trust this person absolutely?" If there is any doubt, a candidate will not pass.

Appendix 2. Overview of the Fellow Selection Process

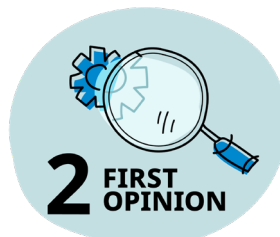
Ashoka searches the world for leading social entrepreneurs through an intensive, human-centered process, selecting them into our Ashoka global, trust-based fellowship of peers.

The selection process phases are:



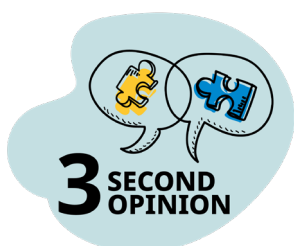
Nomination:

Ashoka accepts and reviews the nominations from social entrepreneurs themselves or anyone familiar with their work on a rolling basis. At each stage in the process, candidates are evaluated based on our five core criteria.



First opinion:

Local Ashoka staff research nominees and the fields they work in, conduct site visits and reference checks, and interview them extensively to identify their central innovation.



Second opinion:

A senior Ashoka representative from outside the region interviews each candidate in-person for 3-4 hours, applying Ashoka's criteria, to understand their life history and system-changing new idea.



Panel:

Ashoka convenes three leading social and business entrepreneurs from the country to assess the candidate's idea and potential impact in relation to the local context. Panelists meet with each candidate individually, and then decide by consensus whether or not to recommend candidates to the Board.



Board review:

The Second Opinion interviewer and Venture staff collaborate to write a candidate "profile" that presents the main elements of the candidate's work and criteria fit. Ashoka's Board of Directors considers profiles and panel recommendations based on Ashoka's worldwide mission and policies, and approves, rejects or requests clarification from staff.

Appendix 3. Complete List of Ashoka Fellows in Disability according to Country

Countries	Number of Fellows
Argentina	7
Austria	3
Bangladesh	7
Bolivia	1
Brazil	22
Cameroon	1
Canada	2
Chile	2
Colombia	6
Costa Rica	2
Côte d'Ivoire	1
Czech Republic	4
Denmark	1
Egypt	6
El Salvador	1
Finland	1
France	6
Germany	10
Hungary	11
India	33
Indonesia	11
Ireland	2
Israel	2
Italy	2
Japan	1
Jordan	1
Kenya	7
Lithuania	1
Mali	1

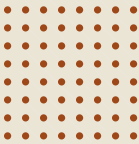
Mexico	10
Morrocco	1
Nepal	4
Netherlands	1
Nigeria	7
Norway	2
Pakistan	1
Palestine	1
Paraguay	2
Peru	1
Philippines	3
Poland	10
Portugal	3
Romania	1
Senegal	1
Slovakia	2
South Africa	2
South Korea	3
Spain	5
Sri Lanka	1
Sweden	2
Switzerland	1
Thailand	5
Turkey	3
Uganda	1
United Kingdom	3
United States of America	19
Venezuela	1
Zimbabwe	1

Appendix 4. Descriptions of Items in Figure 8

Strategies	Number of Fellows
Capacity-Building and Training	Efforts that seek to equip recipients with new and/or improve existing skills, knowledge, and mindsets. Includes: workshops, seminars, mentorship.
Policy and Legal Advocacy	Efforts that seek to pass, amend, or improve laws, regulations, and other policies to be implemented by governments and other influential institutions. Includes: lobbying, policy campaigns.
Curricula, Knowledge Products, or New Models	New frameworks, methodologies, and learning structures that provide alternatives to traditional ones. Includes: guidebooks, pedagogical frameworks, degree programs, market and economic models.
Media & Awareness Campaigns	Publicity efforts to mainstream mindset shifts. Includes: TV and radio shows, magazines and other publications, events, roadshows, social media campaigns.
Therapy, Rehabilitation, and Counselling	Psychological and mental health services. Includes: self or peer help.
Establishment of a Physical Facility	The construction of a physical space to provide services or housing efforts under existing spaces owned by partners .
Economic Opportunities (beyond employment)	Efforts that directly affect the finances and economic mobility of recipients. Includes: scholarships, franchising, reimbursements, subsidization.
Employment Opportunities	Efforts that create jobs for persons with disabilities.
Digital Tools & Platforms	Intangible technology that helps persons with disabilities in a variety of ways. Includes: software, apps, telemedicine, social media and messaging.

Research & Data	Efforts that gather and store information used to improve the lives of persons with disabilities. Includes: monitoring tools, databases, directories.
Medical or Health Services	Efforts that directly address the physical health concerns of persons with disabilities. Includes: diagnostics, medicine.
Language & Communications Accessibility	Efforts that allow persons with disabilities to receive and relay information. Includes: sign language, Braille, translation and interpretation.
Integration with Persons without Disabilities	Efforts that create environments where persons of different abilities can interact with one another. Includes: classrooms, housing, playgrounds.
Recreation & Leisure	Activities done for pleasure and relaxation. Includes: sports and play, gaming, camps.
Physical Tools & Aids	Tangible implements that improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities. Includes: lenses, wheelchairs, crutches, screens, speakers.
Arts & Creativity	Efforts that engage the imaginations of recipients and exercise their creative capabilities. Includes: theater, film, painting, dance, photography, music, literature.
Community Service & Volunteering	Engaging private citizens who willingly contribute time, labor, money, etc. to Ashoka Fellows and/or their organizations.
Certifications, Accreditations, and Awards	The creation of formal acknowledgements that increase the public significance of skills and accommodations that benefit persons with disabilities.
Physical Accessibility	Efforts that improve the design of physical spaces for persons with disabilities. Includes: architectural plans, ramps, signs.
Housing	Physical spaces that provide long-term or temporary accommodations.

Legal Aid	Services that help persons with disabilities gain resources, protections, and more, as stipulated in laws. Includes: litigation, filing and following up on cases.
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CHANGEMAKING WITHOUT BARRIERS



To learn more about Ashoka's work in the field of Disability, Accessibility, and Inclusion, [please visit our Disability Initiative webpage](#).

Discover Ashoka Fellows who are transforming systems and advancing innovative approaches in disability, accessibility, and disability rights — [learn more about these Fellows here](#).

Do you know social entrepreneurs leading impactful work in the field of disability? Ashoka is seeking leaders driving systemic change and building a more inclusive society — [nominate a social entrepreneur here](#).