



Rehabilitation International

News!

A GLOBAL ADVOCATE FOR REHABILITATION, INCLUSION AND HUMAN RIGHTS



Editorial

**Dear Members of Rehabilitation International,
Friends and Partners of Rehabilitation International,
And All Interested Readers,**

Welcome to the August and September 2025 edition of the Rehabilitation International (RI) Newsletter. In this issue, we are proud to share significant developments and inspiring highlights from across our global network:

- ◆ RI Activities
 - Global updates from the President of Rehabilitation International: RI and WHO Initiative on Disability, Health Equity; visit Mongolia and Partnership with the International Social Security Association (ISSA)
- ◆ RI Regional: The visit of RI President to Mongolia; Report from the World Congress of Inclusion International
- ◆ Announcements: Inclusive Symbol Design Competition; Call for Applications to Host the 25th Rehabilitation International World Congress in 2028 – Member organizations are encouraged to express their interest.
- ◆ Science Corner: The Road to Adulthood: How Educators and Families Can Support Young People with Disabilities

We warmly welcome your stories, insights, and updates. Your voices and experiences are essential to advancing our shared vision of equity, inclusion, and dignity for all.

A heartfelt thank-you to our contributors and readers for your ongoing support.

Together, we are building a more inclusive world.

Warm regards,

Hannover, September 2025

RI President & RI Media

In this RI News!

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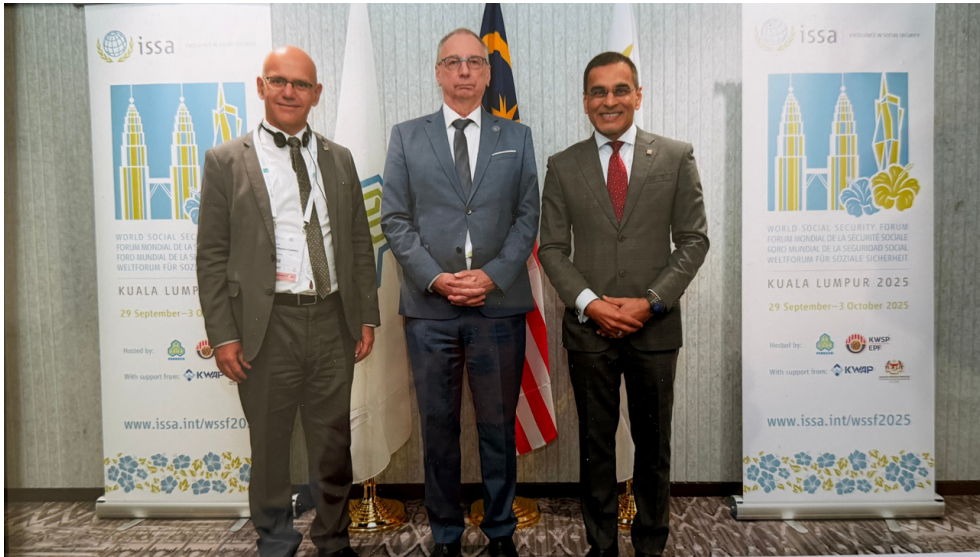
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Global Updates from the President of Rehabilitation International (RI) - 1



The Ceremony of the Partnership between RI and ISSA at Kuala Lumpur. From left to right: Marcelo Abi-Ramia Caetano (Secretary General of ISSA), Prof. Christoph Gutenbrunner, MD, PhD, FRCP, SFEBPRM (RI President), Dr. Mohammed Azman (President of ISSA)

New Global Partnership: RI and the International Social Security Association (ISSA)

At the International Social Security Association (ISSA) Congress in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Professor Gutenbrunner signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Rehabilitation International and ISSA, marking a historic step forward in aligning social protection and rehabilitation efforts worldwide.

“This partnership is a milestone for both organizations,” he stated. “ISSA has deep expertise in social security and compensation systems, while RI brings global experience in rehabilitation and inclusion. Together, we can tackle challenges that neither organization could address alone.”

The MoU outlines joint commitments to:

- Share knowledge and research between both organizations;
- Participate in each other’s conferences and working groups;
- Develop strategies that connect social security benefits with rehabilitation services, ensuring that persons with disabilities are supported not only financially but also through access to rehabilitation, training, and employment opportunities.

The Malaysian government also expressed strong support for these themes during the Congress opening, highlighting its own initiatives in disability inclusion and rehabilitation. “It was inspiring to see such commitment at the national and international level,” Professor Gutenbrunner said. “This collaboration marks the beginning of a new era of partnership between rehabilitation and social protection systems.”

From the interview of RI President with BN in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Global Updates from the President of Rehabilitation International (RI) - 2

WHO Initiative on Disability, Health Equity, and RI's Commitment

Professor Gutenbrunner also highlighted RI's engagement with the WHO Initiative on Disability and Health Equity, a vital global effort to make health systems inclusive and equitable for persons with disabilities.

"Statistical data show that persons with disabilities still face lower access to healthcare and shorter life expectancy—not because of their disability itself, but due to insufficient access to treatment for other health conditions such as diabetes or hypertension," he said.

The WHO Disability and Health Equity Initiative calls for:

- Accessibility of health services for all;
- Social protection and health insurance coverage for persons with disabilities;
- Training for doctors and therapists on inclusive communication and care; and
- Systemic reforms to ensure disability inclusion across health systems.

This initiative was soft-launched during the Conference of States Parties to the UN CRPD in New York (June 2025) and will have its formal launch in Geneva in November 2025.

Rehabilitation International is a proud partner of this global effort.

"RI is fully committed to supporting and integrating the principles of this initiative into our own advocacy and strategy," Professor Gutenbrunner affirmed.

Strengthening Collaboration in Mongolia

Professor Gutenbrunner's official visit to Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, in September 2025 represented a major milestone in strengthening RI's collaboration in East Asia. During his visit, he officially presented the membership certificate recognizing the National Rehabilitation and Development Center for Children with Disabilities (RDC-CWD) as Rehabilitation International's National Member Organization in Mongolia—a proud achievement for the country's rehabilitation sector. "The RDC-CWD is an outstanding institution, providing high-quality care for children with disabilities across multiple disciplines," he said.

"Its integration with education and social services makes it a model for child-centered rehabilitation in the region."

Government Engagement and Systemic Progress

Professor Gutenbrunner met with senior officials from the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, who expressed strong political commitment to strengthening rehabilitation services. The discussions focused on developing comprehensive rehabilitation systems, integrating services across acute, post-acute, and long-term care, and improving coordination between health, education, and social protection sectors.

"Mongolia is moving in the right direction," he said. "They already do a lot, but there's still a long road ahead to fully integrate rehabilitation into the national health system. RI will continue to support their efforts."

Academic Collaboration and Professional Development

He also joined the 20th Anniversary Conference of the Mongolian Society of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine (MSPRM) as a keynote speaker, presenting on 'Rehabilitation and Inclusion: Integrating Strategies for Implementing the UN CRPD.'

His lecture underlined how rehabilitation and inclusion are inseparable pillars of the CRPD framework and offered recommendations for strengthening governance, workforce development, and financing for rehabilitation.

"Physical and rehabilitation medicine contributes not only to improving function and participation but also to maintaining general health," he noted. "This includes addressing other health conditions like diabetes and hypertension among persons with disabilities."

The visit concluded with productive discussions on joint training, research collaborations, and community-based rehabilitation strategies—setting the stage for ongoing cooperation between RI and Mongolia.

Strengthening Partnerships: RI President Professor Christoph Gutenbrunner's Inspiring Visit to Mongolia - 1



Prof. Gutenbrunner was presenting the RI membership certificate to the State Secretary and RDC-CWD Director at the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Protection

Professor Dr. Christoph Gutenbrunner, President of Rehabilitation International (RI), undertook an official visit to Mongolia from 23 to 28 September 2025 at the invitation of the Mongolian Society of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine (MSPRM).

This high-level visit was made possible through the initiative and coordination of Ms. Sheila Purves, Advisor to the MSPRM and the Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation (a WHO Collaborating Center for Rehabilitation), in close collaboration with Ms. Zolzaya Batdavaajav, President of MSPRM, and Mr. Dorjderem Byambasuren, Head of the Department of Child Development and Social Rehabilitation at the National Rehabilitation and Development Center for Children with Disabilities (RDC-CWD).

Strengthening Partnerships for Inclusive Rehabilitation

The program encompassed a series of strategic meetings, lectures, site visits, and professional exchanges aimed at strengthening Mongolia's rehabilitation sector and fostering closer cooperation between Rehabilitation International and national stakeholders.



Meeting with Ms. Gerel Dondovdorj, Head of the General Agency for the Development of Persons with Disabilities.

On 25 September, Professor Gutenbrunner met with Ms. Munkhzul Lkhagvasuren, State Secretary of the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Protection, and Ms. Gerel Dondovdorj, Head of the General Agency for the Development of Persons with Disabilities. The meeting focused on strengthening disability rights, improving the quality and accessibility of rehabilitation services, and enhancing coordination across the health, education, and social protection sectors.

During this meeting, Professor Gutenbrunner presented the official membership certificate formally designating the National Rehabilitation and Development Center for Children with Disabilities (RDC-CWD) as the National Member Organization of Rehabilitation International (RI) in Mongolia. The certificate

Strengthening Partnerships: RI President Professor Christoph Gutenbrunner's Inspiring Visit to Mongolia - 2

was handed to the State Secretary and the Director of the Center, marking a historic milestone for Mongolia's rehabilitation community.

Visit to the RDC-CWD

Following the official meeting, Professor Gutenbrunner visited the RDC-CWD, where he met with Director Ms. Khandsuren Batsuren and senior officials including Mr. Dorjderem Byambasuren, Mr. Ariunbold Myagmar, and Mr. Enkhtuvshin Tulga. Discussions centered on key challenges and opportunities in training, research, and service delivery, with a particular focus on building professional capacity and expanding community-based rehabilitation programs.



ЗОЧИН ИЛТГЭЛ:
СЭРГЭЭН ЗАСАХ
МЭРГЭЖЛИЙН
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БҮРТГЭЛ



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2025.09.25 (Пүрэв гараг)
14:00 цагт

Проф. Кристоф Гутенбруннер

- Сэргээн засахын олон улсын байгууллагын (Rehabilitation International)-ын Ерөнхийлөгч
- Герман Улсын Сэргээн Засах Анагаах Ухааны Холбооны Дэд Ерөнхийлөгч
- Европын Сэргээн Засах Анагаах Ухааны Академийн Удирдах Зөвлөлийн Гишүүн

Сэргээн засах салбарын залуу мэргэжилтэн, оюутан залууст зориулсан семинар, үулзалт

He toured the facility to observe rehabilitation services in practice and engaged with staff to exchange insights on evidence-based approaches, multidisciplinary teamwork, and family-centered care models.

Inspiring the Next Generation of Rehabilitation Professionals

Later that day, Professor Gutenbrunner delivered a guest lecture titled “Working in Rehabilitation: Is It a Burden or Fun?” to an audience of around 70 young professionals and students from urban and rural hospitals and rehabilitation centers. The lecture was followed by lively discussions. He emphasized the importance of inclusion, human rights, teamwork, and personal motivation in advancing the rehabilitation field and encouraged participants to view rehabilitation not only as a medical specialty but as a social mission contributing to dignity and participation for all.



Strengthening Partnerships: RI President Professor Christoph Gutenbrunner's Inspiring Visit to Mongolia - 3



Visit to the RDC-Keynote Address at the 20th Anniversary of MSPRM

On 26 September, Professor Gutenbrunner attended the 20th Anniversary Conference of MSPRM as a keynote speaker, delivering an address titled “Rehabilitation and Inclusion: How to Integrate Both Strategies Towards Implementation of the UN CRPD.” His presentation highlighted the inseparable link between rehabilitation and inclusion and provided key recommendations to the Government of Mongolia for aligning national strategies with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

The keynote emphasized four priority areas for national action:

- Strengthening governance and intersectoral coordination for rehabilitation;
- Building a skilled and motivated rehabilitation workforce;
- Developing sustainable financing mechanisms; and
- Expanding community-based rehabilitation and inclusion services.

National Forum “Rehabilitation and Disability”



Strengthening Partnerships: RI President Professor Christoph Gutenbrunner's Inspiring Visit to Mongolia - 4



The forum resulted in a set of national recommendations for advancing disability-inclusive health and social systems in Mongolia, including:

1. Integrating rehabilitation at all levels of the health system—from primary to tertiary care;
2. Strengthening governance, workforce development, financing, and data systems for rehabilitation;
3. Establishing a National Assistive Technology Center to enhance access to assistive products;
4. Promoting cross-ministerial coordination to ensure rehabilitation and social inclusion for persons with disabilities; and
5. Developing long-term, community-based rehabilitation strategies for rural and remote populations.

Continued Engagement and Knowledge Exchange

On 27 September, Professor Gutenbrunner met with Member of Parliament Ms. Saranchuluun Otgon and Ms. Sheila Purves, Advisor to MSPRM and the Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation, to discuss RI's continued engagement in Mongolia's rehabilitation and inclusion agenda and to explore opportunities for joint initiatives in policy advocacy, research, and capacity building.

He also visited the Burns Branch of the Trauma Hospital, where he met with young rehabilitation doctors and professionals to exchange ideas on innovative post-operative recovery methods, including CO₂-based therapies and interdisciplinary approaches to burn rehabilitation.



Strengthening Partnerships: RI President Professor Christoph Gutenbrunner's Inspiring Visit to Mongolia - 5

A Milestone for Rehabilitation Development in Mongolia

Professor Gutenbrunner's visit marked a significant step forward in strengthening Mongolia's collaboration with the global rehabilitation community. It reaffirmed Rehabilitation International's commitment to supporting countries in developing inclusive, accessible, and person-centered rehabilitation systems aligned with the UN CRPD and the WHO's Rehabilitation 2030 Call for Action.

The visit also inspired renewed enthusiasm among Mongolian rehabilitation professionals and underscored the shared vision of ensuring and marking an important step toward building inclusive, accessible, and person-centered rehabilitation services for all.

Written by

- Ms. Zolzaya Batdavaajav (President, Mongolian Society of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine)
- Ms. Sheila Purves (Advisor, Mongolian Society of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine)
- Mr. Dorjderem Byambasuren (Head, Department of Child Development and Social Rehabilitation, National Rehabilitation and Development Center for Children with Disabilities)

Modified by BN

Report from the World Congress of Inclusion International



For the first time in the Middle East, the World Congress of Inclusion International took place at Expo Centre Sharjah. Over the course of four days, the halls filled with more than 600 people from 74 different countries—self-advocates, family members, policy-makers, and community leaders—all united by a single belief: “We Are Inclusion”.

The congress began on September 14, 2025, with a Families Summit and a Self-Advocacy Summit, where people could share stories that often go unheard. Parents spoke about their daily struggles and successes raising children with intellectual disabilities. Self-advocates talked about what it means to fight for your own voice in a world that too often talks about you instead of with you. These opening gatherings set the tone for everything that followed—the congress would not just be about policies and strategies, it would be about people, their dignity, and their rights.

The official opening ceremony took place on September 15, 2025, under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan Bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, Ruler of the Emirate of Sharjah and a member of the Federal Supreme Council of the United Arab Emirates.

I had the honor of giving a speech in my capacity as Inclusion International President for the Middle East and North Africa region. I also spoke at the closing ceremony and chaired three sessions: two focused on the MENA region and one general session. These opportunities highlighted the importance of amplifying regional voices and perspectives on the global stage.

Across three days, more than 80 sessions were held, from plenary talks to detailed workshops. Topics ranged from inclusive education and employment to legal rights, deinstitutionalization, and the intersection of disability with issues like climate change and gender equality.

Over 150 speakers represented 160 organizations worldwide. Among them was Mr. Abdullah Al Humaidan, Secretary General of the Zayed Higher Organization for People of Determination (ZHO) and Vice President for Rehabilitation International for the Arab Region, who presented a paper during the sessions. Most impactful, however, were the self-advocates who shared their journeys on stage, many for the first time. Families also played a vital role, offering one another support and solidarity.

The congress was about more than dialogue—it was about building skills, confidence, and networks. Globally, it created new bridges for collaboration. Locally, it positioned Sharjah and the UAE as leaders in disability inclusion and sparked conversations in schools, workplaces, and government offices.

Above all, the congress generated momentum. Delegates left not just with contacts, but with renewed determination. The motto “We Are Inclusion” became a living promise, carried across classrooms, governments, and homes worldwide. It served as a reminder that while the struggle for equality continues, progress is possible when we move forward together.

In Sharjah, the congress ended with applause, connections, and the knowledge gained that this was not an ending but a beginning—a step toward a future where inclusion is not aspirational, but real.

Written by Mr. Hashem Taqi

The Road to Adulthood: How Educators and Families Can Support Young People with Disabilities - 1



For young people with disabilities and their families, reaching adulthood is a pivotal milestone filled with hopes, challenges, and crucial decisions. The move from childhood into legal adulthood brings new responsibilities, especially in education and decision-making, yet it is often fraught with obstacles.

Special education professionals—teachers, specialists, and leaders—play a vital role guiding youth through this transition. However, new research reveals these professionals face significant hurdles, including lack of training and resources, that impact how effectively they can support families and empower young adults to live self-determined lives.

The Transition to Adulthood: What It Means

In the United States, federal law recognizes the “age of majority” as when young people legally become adults. For students with disabilities, this means educational decision-making rights shift from parents to the youth themselves. While intended to promote independence, this shift demands that students, families, and schools navigate complex legal and practical terrain, such as guardianship, supported decision-making, and transfer of rights in educational planning.

Guardianship, a legal status where another person makes decisions for an adult deemed incapable, has become a focal point of concern. When used too broadly or unnecessarily, guardianship can limit autonomy and self-determination. The research underscores the need for “less restrictive alternatives” that encourage youth participation while offering needed support.

Challenges Faced by Special Educators

Surveying over 300 special education teachers and leaders, the study identified several core challenges professionals face in supporting youth with disabilities through adulthood transition:

- **Lack of professional training, knowledge, or resources:** Over three-quarters of respondents said they lacked adequate training and tools to effectively guide families and youth, especially around guardianship and supported decision-making.
- **Lack of family training and understanding:** Nearly half reported that families themselves often lack crucial knowledge and resources, making it harder to navigate the transfer of decision-making rights.

The Road to Adulthood: How Educators and Families Can Support Young People with Disabilities - 2

- Contextual factors: Some educators felt these issues did not apply to their student populations due to age or disability type, highlighting the diversity of experiences in special education.
- Low family involvement or expectations: A minority noted challenges related to limited parental engagement or low expectations for student independence, which can affect transition outcomes.

Professional and Family Knowledge Gaps

Many special education professionals report feeling ill-equipped to handle the legal and ethical complexities involved. Some lack confidence discussing guardianship or explaining alternatives to families. Resources and training, both during teacher preparation and ongoing professional development, are often sparse.

Families too often find themselves without clear guidance or are left to seek information on their own. This lack of accessible, plain-language resources makes it tough for parents to make informed decisions and support their child's self-determination.

Encouraging Practices and Hopeful Directions

Despite these challenges, the study highlights reasons for optimism. Increasing attention to self-determination as a right for people with disabilities is driving efforts to develop alternatives to guardianship and support informed consent. Research and advocacy push for improved training curricula, accessible family resources, and involvement of youth in their transition planning.

Programs promoting student-led planning and partnership with families emerge as promising models to increase engagement and positive outcomes. Collaboration among educators, families, and community organizations is vital to build a support network that honors young adults' preferences and goals.

What Can Be Done?

The study's recommendations emphasize:

- Expanding professional development: Special education educators need comprehensive training on legal rights, guardianship alternatives, and strategies to foster self-determination.
- Equipping families: Resources must be accessible, clear, and culturally sensitive to enable families to navigate adulthood transition confidently.
- Early and ongoing planning: Transition planning should begin well before adulthood and be student-centered, empowering youth gradually to participate in decisions about their lives.
- Policy and systemic support: Schools and districts should adopt consistent policies that prioritize autonomy and collaborate with community entities to provide coordinated support.

Conclusion

Helping youth with disabilities transition successfully into adulthood is a shared responsibility that demands education, empathy, and advocacy. When professionals and families are empowered with knowledge and tools, young adults can claim their rightful place as active decision-makers in their education and beyond.

Reference:

Walters, C. B., Smith-Hill, R., Plotner, A. J., & Springgate, A. (2025). *Special Education Professional Perspectives on Challenges to Supporting Youth with Disabilities and their Families into Legal Adulthood*. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 60(1), 35-48.



Rehabilitation
International

Inclusive Education Symbol

Design Competition

Rehabilitation International (RI) is inviting submissions for a 21st Century ***“International Symbol of Inclusive Education”*** to represent core values of rights and inclusion, equity and independence, diversity, physical and virtual accessibility for all, including people with disabilities.

The challenge is to develop an international symbol of inclusive education that reflect this goal. The competition is an opportunity for all designers interested in promoting design for all -awareness and accessibility and participation for all.

Competition announced
and launched

15 September
2025

5 October
2025

Deadline for the
receipt of questions

Answers for the questions

24 October
2025

15 November
2025

Submission Deadline
17:00, Hong Kong Time



Contact us

Questions should be sent to
competition secretariat
AUAHK at info@auahk.org
by 5 October 2025.



Competition Organizer

Rehabilitation International (RI)

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Phone (interim period) +49 176 611 77 125
Email info@riglobal.org

Web <https://www.riglobal.org/>

Submission
Open
Now

<https://ridesigncompetition.auahk.org/>



Save the Date

Call for Applications to Host the 25th RI World Congress in 2028

As one of RI's most significant events, the World Congress is an unparalleled opportunity to bring together international leaders, experts, and advocates committed to advancing the rights and inclusion of persons with disability on a global level. The Congress serves as a vital platform for sharing knowledge, strengthening partnerships, and shaping global agendas.

Following the tremendous success of the 2024 World Congress in Abu Dhabi, we now invite RI Member Organizations to submit proposals to host the 2028 event. Please find attached the full announcement and supporting documents, which include:

- RI WC 2028 – General Outline
- RI WC 2028 – Bid National Host
- RI WC 2028 Bid for International Congress Host

These documents provide detailed information about the Congress vision and the requirements for hosting. They are available for download on the RI website: <https://www.riglobal.org/ri-announces-the-call-for-applications-to-host-the-25th-ri-world-congress-in-2028/>

The deadline for proposal submissions is **December 20, 2025**.

Should you have any questions or need further information, please do not hesitate to reach out.

We look forward to receiving your proposal and working together to make the 2028 World Congress another landmark event for the global disability community.

RI Governing Assembly 2025 combined with a RI Regional Conference

The RI Governing Assembly 2025 combined with a RI Regional Conference will be held in Delhi (India) from November 6-9, 2025.

For more information: <https://internationalconferenceajct2025.org/>

The Second World Summit on Social Development

The Second World Summit on Social Development will be held from Nov 4 to 6, 2025 in Doha (Qatar).

For more information: <https://social.desa.un.org/world-summit-2025>

Call for contribution

A heartfelt thank you to all our contributors for your invaluable support, dedication, and engagement! Your efforts continue to inspire and drive our shared mission of creating a more inclusive world for everyone.

We are excited to invite:

- **Member Organizations:** Showcase your impactful programs, innovative projects, and success stories that advance rehabilitation and inclusion.
- **RI President & Vice Presidents:** Share your strategic insights, regional updates, and experiences from the frontlines of advocacy.
- **RI Commissions:** Contribute research findings, policy recommendations, or groundbreaking initiatives that shape the future of accessibility and empowerment.
- **RI Regions:** Highlight local achievements, unique cultural approaches to rehabilitation, and stories of resilience within your communities.

Whether it's a breakthrough initiative or an inspiring individual, we encourage you to share your activities, achievements, thoughts, or ideas with us. Your contributions provide valuable insights and help amplify the incredible work being carried out worldwide.

Why Contribute?

Your stories not only foster collaboration and learning but also inspire others within the Rehabilitation International community to take meaningful action. Together, we can create a powerful platform for change and advocacy.

How to Submit?

Please send your submissions to: **RI Media** (rimedia@riglobal.org)

We welcome articles, photos, videos, and any other materials that best showcase your work and its impact.

Let's continue to work together to shine a light on the exceptional efforts that make a difference in the lives of individuals and communities around the world.

We look forward to hearing from you soon!

Don't forget to check and follow our social media:



ri_global



@ri_global



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**A GLOBAL ADVOCATE FOR REHABILITATION,
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