



protecting childhood

Policy Recommendation Report: Alignment with the UNCRPD in Sri Lankan Child Protection

Submitted to
Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social
Empowerment
Government of Sri Lanka

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Executive Summary

In May 2023, Children's Emergency Relief International started with the primary goal of aligning child protection policies and systems in Sri Lanka with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and related international frameworks. This alignment aimed to improve the inclusion and protection of children with disabilities (CWD).

This report summarizes the findings of an informative assessment and expert interviews with thematic analysis, focusing especially on the rights of CWD within Sri Lanka's child protection system. The document offers a series of practical recommendations designed to harmonize the child protection system with the principles of the CRPD. These recommendations are firmly grounded in robust evidence, strictly adhere to CRPD guidelines, and draw inspiration from international best practices.

The recommended strategies are crafted to be both actionable and economically viable, considering complex the conditions in Sri Lanka. They include measures to strengthen the existing framework, facilitate improved coordination and collaboration among stakeholders, and initiate a national marketing and branding campaign dedicated to the rights of CWD within the Sri Lankan child protection system. These measures have been meticulously crafted to enhance the protection and integration of CWD within the system.

Introduction

The global landscape of child protection mechanisms is undergoing a transformative phase, transitioning from conventional institutional models to a diverse array of family-centric alternatives. The evolution of these systems encompasses intricate, multidimensional reforms, primarily directed towards catering to the needs of the most marginalized strata of society. Despite the well-meaning nature of these reforms, individuals and families grappling with disabilities frequently encounter inadequate support and are inadvertently excluded from the purview of such initiatives. Within this discourse, this article finds its foundation in the inherent capabilities and prospects inherent to the engagement of children with disabilities (CWD) and families within the context of the ongoing reformative endeavors within the child protection framework of Sri Lanka. This article is underpinned by an alignment of the congruence between Sri Lanka's child protection system and the principles enshrined within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

The project applied a multi-method study, including secondary data assessment and expert interviews with thematic analysis.¹ The informative assessment involved a secondary assessment of challenges in Sri Lanka's child protection system and disability inclusion practices and a comparative analysis of CRPD alignment in different countries. Based on the review of 242 sources, key areas identified for better policy included coordination, awareness, accessibility, stigma alleviation, and comprehensive data for CWD well-being. The qualitative research engaged 11 experts via virtual, semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis utilized Excel coding to ensure data accuracy, supporting advocacy for a comprehensive child protection system. Methodological details are explained in Appendix 1.

Countless consultants' reports ask for bold recommendations with huge budgets and unrealistic expectations. This report suggests immediately actionable solutions to align Sri Lanka's child protection system with the CRPD, for the most part, using existing budgets and staffing. The initial steps recommended can establish the creation of a more robust and multidimensional implementation and change plan.

Context

In Sri Lanka, the Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social Empowerment (MWCASE) governs child protection.² Sri Lanka ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991 and has an obligation to take proper measures in all aspects, including legislation, administration, and social status, to protect all children from any form of physical and mental abuse and violence, exploitation, neglect, and maltreatment (Article 19).³ ⁴ The Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, No. 28 of 1996, provides legal protection and promotes the rights of all persons with disabilities (PWD).⁵ Having ratified the CRPD in 2016, Sri Lanka holds obligations, including Article 7 on CWD.⁶

Informative Assessment Findings

Based on identified key areas,⁷ a secondary assessment of Sri Lanka's status and a comparative international analysis were conducted, with the source list available in Appendix 2 and a data analysis overview available in Appendix 3. The reviewed results concerning the impacts of measures on disability inclusion and well-being for CWD are outlined as follows:

1. **Priority of accessibility and availability:** In Sri Lanka, healthcare and social protection are particularly inadequate or unaffordable for CWD, hindering their well-being.⁸ The scarcity of specialized services and trained professionals, especially in rural areas, exacerbates the issue, resulting in unequal access to quality support and resources.⁹ Similar challenges are found in other countries as well. Bulgaria lacks adequate support for CWD below a certain threshold, whereas Albania faces limitations in access to social services and state support for comprehensive child protection.¹⁰ Malaysia has some shortcomings in discrimination prohibition and access to healthcare for CWD, despite government focus.¹¹ Cambodia experiences government policy failures in providing access to basic social services for CWD.¹²
2. **Need for addressing stigma and discrimination:** Addressing negative attitudes, cultural norms, and discrimination in Sri Lanka could improve the well-being and social participation of CWD.^{13 14} Historical discrimination and inequality caused by diverse ethnicities and pity from society further worsen CWD's challenges.¹⁵ Policy development alone is insufficient to tackle these issues.¹⁶ Despite an inclusive policy framework,¹⁷ cases from around the world illustrate the continued struggles, such as structural violence against parents with intellectual disabilities in Iceland due to stigma and discrimination.¹⁸ In Latin America and the Caribbean, CWD are often seen as charity recipients rather than rights holders.¹⁹
3. **Importance of increased awareness:** The challenges in Sri Lanka related to child protection, disability rights, and CWD's intersectional issues might not be given enough priority. It is critical to enhance awareness and understanding among policymakers, professionals, and the public to address these challenges and divide adequate resources.²⁰ Educational institutions, the media, and some organizations use outdated terms such as handicapped and differently abled children. Striving for

updated and inclusive language could promote positive change.²¹ Many countries lack clear policy approaches and objectives toward raising awareness of CWD status. The Philippines has limited recognition of abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation, or discrimination, while adults in Qatar have limited understanding of preventing child abuse and neglect.^{22 23}

4. ***Need for more robust framework:*** Sri Lanka has laws and policies to protect children and promote disability rights.^{24 25} However, there might be gaps in their effective implementation and enforcement.^{26 27} One of the significant issues in the current legal framework is the inconsistency in defining who qualifies as a child.^{28 29} Currently, there is a global trend towards child-centric paradigms and expanding child welfare systems.³⁰ In 2022, the Sri Lankan parliament approved an amendment to the Children and Young Persons Ordinance, aligning it with international standards by defining children as those aged 18 years and below.^{31 32 33} In particular, Northern European nations embraced the child-centric paradigms through a universal service approach.³⁴ Ireland has focused on specialized services for CWD since 2012.³⁵ The Netherlands, Germany, and England have emphasized family services, and Scotland tends to focus on parental perspectives.³⁶ Some sub-Saharan African constitutional provisions guarantee the rights of PWD.³⁷ Australia, Cameroon, and Chile lack a comprehensive policy, especially addressing the CWD's needs, despite having a national child protection framework.^{38 39 40} While there are disability definition guidelines such as the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health provided by the World Health Organization, as well as the CRPD, each country typically customizes them to align with their unique contexts. Despite efforts by some countries, such as many countries in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region, to comply with the CRC and CRPD, there is often a lack of emphasis on the rights of CWD in their national plans of action for realizing children's rights.^{41 42 43}
5. ***Opportunity for greater coordination and collaboration:*** Stronger coordination and collaboration among government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other stakeholders would be necessary to strengthen child protection and disability inclusion and build a more efficient system.⁴⁴ Although many countries work towards enhancing coordination and collaboration schemes, they experience various challenges. Austria makes efforts towards addressing the concerns raised by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on its separate systems for child welfare and services for CWD.⁴⁵ Ethiopia, Malawi, and Uganda face financial shortages that hinder

the continuation of training programs for government institutions and organizations involved in children's rights.^{46 47} West African countries such as Guinea, Niger, Sierra Leone, and Togo struggle with developing partnerships and coalitions with civil society, NGOs, and Disabled People's Organizations (DPOs) to more effectively advocate and influence policy.⁴⁸

- 6. *Significance of comprehensive data and research:*** In Sri Lanka, the higher accuracy and transparency of data about CWD could contribute to enhanced child protection and disability inclusion efforts. The outdated 2012 Census and the limited scope of the 2019 Census of Children in Child Care Institutions fail to provide a comprehensive understanding of CWD.^{49 50} CWD under five years old lack national registration, which excludes them from social protection mechanisms.⁵¹ It is possible to better support and integrate CWD in society by filling in these data gaps.⁵² Globally, many countries do not have enough data on child protection.⁵³ In Kenya, clear findings are missing.⁵⁴ Southeast Asia, South Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Central Europe face a scarcity of literature and struggle with accurate disability measurement.^{55 56 57 58} In Australia, North America, and Europe, most child abuse cases go unreported, leading to low estimates in official child protection agency data.⁵⁹ Data collection in humanitarian settings is inconsistent and unreliable.⁶⁰

Expert Interviews Findings

11 expert interviews were conducted to explore challenges, successes, and opportunities related to CWD's rights in the child protection system in Sri Lanka, with a detailed data breakdown in Appendix 5. While concise summaries are provided for cases with a sample size less than 3 ($n < 3$), the key perspectives and insights from the interviews are organized into 5 categories as follows:

1. ***Experiences and Insights in Enhancing Inclusion and Protection:*** All interviewees mentioned experiences with countering misconceptions about CWD. 10 highlighted advancing inclusivity for CWD. 8 emphasized difficulties in shifting perspectives, raising awareness, and fighting CWD discrimination. 7 stressed inadequate facilities, resources, and qualified personnel. 6 underscored advocacy for CWD inclusion in child laws, education improvements, and upskilling for CWD independence. 5 mentioned initiatives such as the IoT Center and inclusive education. 4 noted the need for community-based services and sustained collaborative efforts. 3 underscored historical policy approaches and implementation issues in disability and admitted unique CWD needs and parental inputs. A few recognized historical impacts such as the Civil War, outdated practices such as segregating children based on perceived educability, and the complex interplay between financial constraints, power dynamics, and limited disability awareness.
2. ***Awareness of CWD's Rights and Needs:*** All interviewees pointed out the limited awareness and understanding in society of CWD's rights and needs, and a lack of prominent awareness initiatives and support measures for CWD, which increases gaps between disability rights understanding and practical policy implementation. 5 highlighted insufficient support for inclusive environments and accessibility in society, and 4 noted this worsening impact under the COVID-19 pandemic and financial instability. 3 mentioned the need for enhancing awareness at a local level through accessible formats to address the gap, the importance of DPOs' direct involvement, challenges in DPO collaboration and unity, awareness gaps between Colombo-based and provincial civil society organizations (CSOs), and CSOs' financial constraints and challenges with international agencies.

3. ***Unique Challenges of CWD in Emergency:*** 9 interviewees highlighted inadequate facilities, support, and resource deficits in institutions during financial instability, disasters, and pandemics. 6 advocated for CWD's rights, urging policy adjustments. 5 participants noted heightened victimization and vulnerability during emergencies with limited communication. A few spoke of a transition to community-based care over institutionalization, education disruption due to economic uncertainty, illnesses, and caregiving challenges, growing disparities with non-disabled education prioritization, and the impact of religious beliefs on family-oriented concepts affecting CWD care. There were views: a higher risk of abandonment of CWD due to parental hardships; hindering self-sufficiency despite unsustainable aid; corruption, mismanagement, and visionary deficits in politics; overemphasis on humanities subjects and limitations; and impoverished children's ambitions, focused on immediate gains, leading to adverse effects on the environment and society. There was a view for improvement in the low transparency and inaccuracy of statistics and data to gather the information needed to address these matters.
4. ***Challenges in Child Protection System for CWD:*** All interviewees highlighted the pervasive discrimination and stigma attached to disabilities, influenced by interpretations of diverse cultures and pluralistic religious beliefs. 7 participants called for a comprehensive child protection framework to address these, while 6 noted defects in legal enforceability and policy intersectionality and educational disparities affecting child protection. 4 emphasized disinterest from the government. 3 outlined familial abuse, unreported exploitation, poverty driven by disability-related factors, limited facilities, services, support, and care for CWD, inadequate channels for expressing CWD's feelings, and insufficient early community-based rehabilitation (CBR) interventions for disabled infants,⁶¹ which impact awareness, education, and healthcare access for CWD. There was a view regarding poor governance practices.
5. ***Steps for Effective Child Protection Policies:*** 9 interviewees called for the establishment of inclusive systems for CWD, including continuous improvements. 7 underlined the need for practical training in disability inclusion and child protection for government officials and professionals. 6 advocated for fostering collaboration among government ministries and NGOs for a holistic CWD support ecosystem. 5 stressed cross-ministerial collaboration for policy enhancements and comprehensive systems. 4 highlighted societal involvement in safeguarding CWD's rights and well-being and establishing professional networks in institutions and schools, including workshops. 3 emphasized:

active engagement with ministries and international organizations; priorities about mental and physical accessibility and standardized child protection; a positive mindset about CWD's capabilities; translating frameworks into action through strong leadership; transparent fund-policy alignment; accurate data collection for decision-making, awareness, and funding support; and evidence-based approaches for crafting policies. A few interviewees expressed views about empathetic policy design for inclusivity considering history, advocacy for strict actions against perpetrators and special courts, and sustained NGO-monitored tracking.

Evidence-Based Recommendations

There is limited literature mentioning the CRPD alignment with Sri Lankan policies and a lack of definitive discussions and feasible solutions for child protection in the context of CWD. The existing resources are insufficient, and there is a need for a more comprehensive and thorough exploration of the subject matter. Even with an emphasis on strengthening the capacity to address issues impacting CWD, the effectiveness and outcomes of policy implementation and measures for this population could be further explored. Addressing these matters would encourage improved outcomes and inclusivity. Looking at the findings of comparative analysis in different countries, overall, much of the literature lacks decisive, feasible solutions and recommendations regarding child protection and disability inclusion for CWD.^{62 63} Upholding CWD's rights, respecting their views, and offering accessible platforms for their involvement in decision-making processes are vital.

The expert interviews reveal intricate sociocultural interactions affecting CWD protection in Sri Lanka. The nation's diverse population, including Sinhalese, Tamil, Moor, and other communities, continues to struggle with disability-based discrimination and inequality. Cultural stigma and complicated interpretation of any form of disability contributes to challenges for CWD in their families and communities. Despite the richness of cultural and religious diversity, it can also exacerbate issues within societal dynamics. Given the historical context of political and civil conflicts in the nation and its diverse population, a comprehensive approach is pivotal to addressing disability rates and challenges. Limited attention to raising awareness and promoting cultural shifts poses challenges to the advancement of child protection, leaving CWD exposed to harm due to a lack of a protective framework, high abuse rates, and communication barriers. Financial constraints perpetuate difficulties and worsen discrimination, adoption challenges, and school exclusion.

The interview findings underscore how interconnected factors, such as poverty, inadequate resources, professional gaps, economic disparities, disrupted education, and facility deficits, perpetuate challenges for CWD in child protection. Despite skill development and attitude change efforts, raising awareness encounters obstacles. Data-driven strategies could establish enforceable inclusive policies countering ableism and addressing CWD's needs. Initiatives, including effective CBR and awareness campaigns, underpinned by collaboration and communities, contribute to building resilience. Prioritizing a culturally

sensitive environment upholds inclusivity and CWD's rights, accelerating solution implementation and fostering equity. A comprehensive approach combining these elements could be promising for successfully addressing the challenges faced by CWD.

To strengthen the child protection system in Sri Lanka, this set of recommendations emphasizes the equal recognition of CWD as rights holders, ensuring their prioritization. These recommendations consider conditions, including short-term actions for immediate impact within limited budgets or without visible funds, while maintaining actionable strategies. Each recommendation includes only the first of many steps necessary to achieve the goal. Based on these recommendations, further research can be conducted, and a more comprehensive action and change plan should be created.

The proposed strategies for specific actions, policies, and interventions designed to effectively address these priorities are the following:

1. ***Collaboration and Governance among Ministries and Agencies:***⁶⁴ Create a digital platform for real-time collaboration among liaison officials from diverse ministries and agencies, facilitating resource sharing; form an Inter-Ministerial Committee with representatives from key ministries to coordinate policies, resources, and regular cross-sectoral workshops for integrated approaches to CWD support; and establish a National Council for CWD,⁶⁵ involving ministries, agencies, and civil society, for coordinated efforts and resource allocation. This strategic step reduces reliance on a single ministry, harmonizes national disability policies, and enforces recommendations transparently, ensuring effective implementation and addressing diverse CWD issues.

First steps: Enlist university students or central government officials to map existing working groups focused on child protection, their active participants, and their strengths.⁶⁶ Evaluate recent performance against intended objectives and propose consolidated groups, led by a repurposed government position as a paid Secretariat, overseeing a three-year pilot for streamlined operations and performance assessment.

Cost: No additional cost (repurpose existing budgets and resources; minimal adjustments for Secretariat role).

Time: One year to make recommendations, 6 months to reform the suggested group(s) and then a 2-year pilot of the suggested working group(s).

Personnel: Skilled personnel(s) familiar with child protection and disability rights, taking ownership and supervision of the project who understands research, human relationships, and project management (these individuals should work closely with relevant departments and stakeholders).

2. **More Robust Legal Frameworks:** Enhance CWD's rights through legal amendments, including provisions for expedited legal procedures and penalties for discrimination or abuse, safeguarding CWD access to services, education, and healthcare,⁶⁷ and creating expert family courts for expedited, equitable legal processes; and create a comprehensive empowerment program for CWD and their families, featuring an accessible online abuse reporting portal, regular inclusive town hall meetings with lawmakers and council members, and a multilingual guide to CWD's legal rights distributed through community hubs. This bridges practicality and aspirations, crafting inclusive policies that uphold rights and foster inclusiveness, thus establishing a robust legal framework.

First steps: Review all current, upcoming, and anticipated official policies to align with the CRPD, incorporating dedicated CRPD-aligned sections into new policies.

Cost: No additional cost within the MWCASE (budgets and human resources can be re-allocated), but budgets might be needed for coordination and implementation beyond ministries and departments.

Time: Up to 6 months to review all existing policies.

Personnel: Experienced project manager with expertise in research, human relationships, and policy analysis to take ownership and supervise the project (this individual should work closely with relevant departments and stakeholders).

3. **Data Collection,⁶⁸ Research, and Monitoring:** Collaborate with academic institutions for CWD research, a nationwide survey, and student-involved data collection on challenges and opportunities; create a database that compiles disaggregated data on CWD by disability, gender, age, and ethnicity, enabling evidence-based policy formulation and targeted interventions; and mandate regular assessments of CWD inclusion and progress across sectors, with the findings publicly available to ensure transparency and accountability. This strategy includes capturing disaggregated data, even for under-fives, to facilitate effective CBR implementation.⁶⁹ Consistently evaluate policies for

effectiveness, using collected data to bolster evidence-based approaches, and foster inter-ministerial collaboration to create tailored measures that address distinctive CWD requirements, informed by coded data for recommendations.

First steps: Reach out to academic institutions, research organizations, and disability-focused NGOs to establish partnerships for conducting CWD research, nationwide surveys, and data collection. Develop a clear framework for collaboration, outlining roles, responsibilities, and data-sharing agreements, including the organization of regular meetings.

Cost: No additional cost within the MWCASE (budgets and human resources can be re-allocated), but budgets might be needed for research.

Time: Approximately 2 to 3 months to establish collaborative partnerships.

Personnel: Personnel who can command engagement from relevant ministries or departments, including policy advisors, data analysts, project liaisons, and legal representatives. For this position, personnel from the Department of Census and Statistics should be involved.

4. ***Strategies for Partnerships, Advocacy, and Campaigning:*** Establish a government-led partnership program linking ministries with disability-focused NGOs;⁷⁰ form a national CWD advisory board comprising government representatives, advocacy groups, and CWD for policy guidance; organize community events and national awareness campaigns featuring CWD abilities; collaborate with influencers for awareness to promote inclusivity and equal opportunities; and build international partnerships for technical expertise and resources. These could be useful to counter historical biases, differentiate disabilities from diseases, and prioritize function-focused interventions, which dispel misconceptions.

First steps: For establishing government-led partnerships, conduct a thorough mapping of disability-focused NGOs and relevant ministries. Identify shared goals, initiate dialogues, and formulate a cooperative framework.

Cost: None additional cost within the MWCASE (budgets and human resources can be re-allocated), but essential to ensure budget and fund allocation for partnerships.⁷¹

Time: Approximately 4 to 6 months.

Personnel: Research, communication, and budget experts to facilitate mapping, communication, and fund allocation for partnerships.

5. **Paradigm Shift from Charity to a Human Rights–Based Approach:** Develop media guidelines for respectful representation of CWD, supported by a national campaign featuring their rights; simultaneously, initiate an online drive encouraging inclusive spaces while integrating accessibility across sectors to ensure equitable opportunities within a human rights framework; and embed disability awareness in practical teacher training and school curricula, adjustments to lesson plans, and accommodations during examinations to nurture inclusive classrooms and foster understanding and respect from an early age. These actions could effectively promote a transition from a charity–based to a human rights–based perspective on disability. This includes reevaluating terminology to ensure respectful and inclusive representations of persons with disabilities and incorporating person–first language to enhance inclusivity.

First steps: Develop a comprehensive set of media guidelines for the respectful representation of individuals with disabilities, including CWD.⁷² Transmit information through TV programs and advertisements by collaborating with disability rights and child protection experts, advocacy groups, and state–owned media professionals to ensure accuracy and inclusivity in portrayal.⁷³

Cost: No additional cost within the MWCASE (budgets and human resources can be re–allocated), but needed budgets for expert consultations, research, and design work for the guidelines.⁷⁴

Time: Approximately 2 to 3 months to collect input from different stakeholders, analyze best practices, and draft the media guidelines.

Personnel: Personnel specializing in disability inclusion, education, communication, accessibility, human rights, policy analysis, project management, community engagement, inclusion training, and evaluation.⁷⁵ For this position, personnel from the Human Rights Commission should be involved.⁷⁶

6. **Legal Literacy and CWD Rights Education:** Incorporate CWD's human rights education for legal literacy into legal training for legal professionals and vocational programs for

individuals with disabilities; develop community workshops, a mobile legal clinic, and improved bar association pro bono services to increase access to legal assistance by collaborating with community centers and bar associations; and create engaging online content such as animated videos as interactive modules to explain essential legal rights of CWD in an easily accessible manner. By implementing these strategies, the recognition of CWD as rights holders could be elevated, contributing to bridging gaps in transitional justice and legal reform initiatives.

First steps: Assess gaps in legal literacy and disability rights education for CWDs, including legal assistance access, through engagement with community centers, disability groups, legal experts, and individuals with disabilities.

Cost: No additional cost within the MWCASE (budgets and human resources can be re-allocated), but requiring minimal costs for communication efforts such as emails, phone calls, and possibly small informational materials for initial presentations.

Time: Up to 1 to 2 months to establish contact, arrange meetings, and discuss potential collaboration.

Personnel: Program coordinator in managing and facilitating the various components of the initiative while emphasizing the focus on legal literacy and disability rights education.⁷⁷

- 7. *Fostering Professional Support and Resources for CWD:*** Create comprehensive training and certification initiatives for healthcare professionals and educators, covering specialized care, inclusive education, and disability-sensitive healthcare practices; implement a mentorship program connecting experienced practitioners with newcomers in CWD support; establish regional resource centers in key areas to provide information, counseling, and training for families of CWD; and develop an online resource offering resources and guidance for parents, caregivers, and teachers of CWD, with a focus on widespread accessibility. These steps could be beneficial in prioritizing essential resources, such as nutritious food,⁷⁸ guided by the principles of efficient allocation of personnel and resources.

First steps: Collaborate with experts to design a specialized training curriculum for healthcare professionals and educators to effectively support CWD by covering specialized care, inclusive education practices, and disability-sensitive healthcare

approaches.

Cost: No additional cost within the MWCASE (budgets and human resources can be re-allocated), but essential to ensure budget for initial curriculum development and collaboration expenses.⁷⁹

Time: 6 to 8 months for curriculum development and initial preparations.

Personnel: Officials with expertise in child protection, disabilities, education, healthcare, and program coordination and management.

8. ***Measures to Reduce Vulnerabilities:*** Cooperate with local communities to establish neighborhood support networks, providing practical assistance and emotional support to CWD and their families; partner with architectural firms with the goal of crafting accessible spaces while promoting universal design principles; and collaborate with local governments to develop inclusive communities that boast accessible infrastructure and services for CWD. These efforts can aid in creating nationally recognized disability-friendly spaces, highlighting collaboration for inclusive environments, equitable support systems, and crisis resolution.

First steps: Engage local community leaders, disability advocates, and relevant organizations to discuss creating neighborhood support networks for CWD and their families, using meetings and workshops to share and gather views on their practical needs.

Cost: No additional cost within the MWCASE (budgets and human resources can be re-allocated), but essential to ensure budgeting for initial costs that primarily involve communication and coordination expenses, such as organizing meetings and creating informational materials.⁸⁰

Time: 2 to 3 months, accounting for planning the meetings, inviting participants, holding discussions, and compiling feedback.

Personnel: Representative officials, who are in charge of community liaison and engagement, from relevant departments, such as child protection and disability services, community development, and social welfare, to participate in discussions and facilitate collaboration with the local government.

Practical, Actionable, and Budget-Sensitive Action Steps

Recommendation 1

- First Step: Streamline child protection working groups through consolidated governance
- Cost: No additional cost

Recommendation 2

- First Step: Review policies for CRPD alignment and its principles' integration
- Cost: No additional cost within the MWCASE but might be needed for coordination and implementation

Recommendation 3

- First Step: Create collaborative frameworks for inclusive CWD research and data collection
- Cost: No additional cost within the MWCASE but might be needed for research

Recommendation 4

- First Step: Establish government-led partnership mapping for collaborative disability initiatives
- Cost: No additional cost within MWCASE but essential to partnerships

Recommendation 5

- First Step: Create inclusive media guidelines for disability representation, including CWD
- Cost: No additional cost within MWCASE but needed for expert consultations, research, and design work

Recommendation 6

- First Step: Assess initial legal literacy gap for CWD
- Cost: No additional cost within MWCASE but requiring minimal costs for communication efforts

Recommendation 7

- First Step: Develop comprehensive training and certification initiatives
- Cost: No additional cost within MWCASE but essential to initial curriculum development and collaboration expenses

Recommendation 8

- First Step: Identify and engage local community leaders
- Cost: No additional cost within MWCASE but essential to involvement, communication, and coordination expenses

Limitations

During interviews, language barriers might have limited nuanced discussions, especially for Tamil or Sinhala speakers. The study's short timeframe (July to August 2023) could bias the data and hinder Sri Lanka-wide generalizability. Contextualizing expert views within Sri Lanka's political and health landscape is crucial, though limited by the paper's scope. Future research should expand interviews and incorporate contextual factors for more comprehensive insights.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores the dynamic global shift in child protection paradigms, emphasizing the transition from institutional care to family-oriented alternatives. The intricate and multi-faceted nature of these reforms presents both opportunities and challenges, particularly in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable segments of society. While the genuine intentions behind these reforms are evident, it is essential to acknowledge the inadvertent oversight and underrepresentation of individuals and families with disabilities. By focusing on the strengths and potentials intrinsic to CWD and families, this research highlights the importance of their meaningful inclusion in the ongoing reform efforts within Sri Lanka's child protection system. The lens of analysis, anchored in the CRPD, provides a comprehensive framework for assessing the alignment of Sri Lanka's initiatives with global standards. This project highlights the imperative to foster inclusivity, equity, and rights-based approaches in the pursuit of a holistic and effective child protection system that leaves no one behind.

The recommendations are the first steps to finding a robust intervention and change plan to align Sri Lanka's child protection system with the CRPD. They are immediately actionable and achievable by the existing governmental and civil society bodies with a moderate and manageable budget commitment.

By implementing these strategies, Sri Lanka can move towards a compassionate and prosperous society where CWD and all citizens can thrive more harmoniously. The ultimate goal is the holistic development and safeguarding of all children's rights, thus catalyzing a sustained transformation throughout the societal structure.

Appendix 1 (Methodology)

Research Objective

Identify perspectives to promotion of inclusive policies, empowerment of CWD, and fostering an inclusive society guided by human rights principles

Research Approach

Multi-method study involving secondary data assessment and expert interviews utilizing thematic analysis⁸¹

Informative Assessment

Review of Sri Lanka's policy framework, including Article 12(4) of the Constitution and the National Policy on Child Protection, and a total of 242 sources, including a scoping review of 134 academic journals, its complementary review of 29 reports, and 42 web articles, mainly post-2017 (Appendix 2 and 3)

- **Secondary assessment** of challenges in existing child protection policies and disability inclusion practices in Sri Lanka based on comprehensive literature review on child protection and disability views in Sri Lanka
- **Comparative analysis** of international child protection policies aligned with CRPD; comparison of Sri Lanka's child protection with CRPD provisions and analogous frameworks in other countries; and selection of target countries based on child protection, disability rights alignment, and socio-cultural similarities.

Qualitative Research

- **Expert Interviews:** 11 experts with extensive professional experience in policymaking, child protection, education, and disability advocacy (various age ranges, gender identities, and religious affiliations); conducted virtually from July to August 2023; semi-structured interviews using a pre-distributed Stakeholder Interview Questionnaire (Appendix 4); interviews lasted 30 to 90 minutes, conducted in English or Japanese; emphasis on confidentiality, respect for participants' rights and privacy, secured recording consent, and ethical considerations
- **Thematic Analysis:** Identification of recurring patterns and themes in interview responses; Data organization and coding using Microsoft Excel (Appendix 5); Exploration of CWD's rights in Sri Lanka's child protection policies

Key Areas Identified

Stronger framework and coordination, Higher awareness, Enhanced accessibility, Stigma reduction, Comprehensive data for CWD's well-being and safety

Appendix 2 (Source List)

Academic Journals

Sri Lanka

- Blades, H. (2020). Dancing Right(s): Dance, disability and legal empowerment in post-war Sri Lanka. *Dance Research*, 39(1), 72–88. <https://doi.org/10.3366/drs.2020.0319>
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Appendix 3 (Data Analysis Overview)

Reviewed Sources

Types	Number of Sources	Mentions of CWD	Mentions of Child Protection
Academic Journals	134	64	77
Reports	29	20	13
Web Articles	42	6	22
Others	37	18	17
Total	242	108	129

Secondary Assessment of Sri Lanka's Status

Categories	Keywords	Number of Sources	Mentions of CWD	Mentions of Child Protection	Main Sources
Child Protection	Child protection, Abuse, Exploitation, Neglect, Labor, Trafficking, Privacy, Justice, Crime, Survival, Alignment, Ratification, CRC	43	16	41	de Silva (2007), Department of Census and Statistics (2021), Economic and Social Council (2022), Munasinghe (2015), National Child Protection Authority (2019), Pahalawatte (2021), UNICEF Sri Lanka (2018e), UNICEF Sri Lanka (2018i)
Disability Inclusion and Rights	Disabilities, Advocacy, Rights, Inclusion, Legal mobilization, Acceptance, Marginalization, Alignment, Ratification, CRPD	26	19	4	Campbell (2013), Economic and Social Council (2022), Galahitiyawa (2023), Mendis & Perera (2019), Munasinghe (2015), Kasturiarachchi (2020), Liyanage (2017), Peiris-John et al. (2014), Roar Media (2016), Samararatne & Soldatic (2015), UNICEF Sri Lanka (2018i)
Healthcare	Healthcare, Health priorities, Universal health coverage, Public health services, Trauma, Mental health services	11	6	7	de Silva (2007), Department of Census and Statistics (2021), Economic and Social Council (2022)
Education	Special education, Inclusive education, Learning disabilities, Early childhood development, Child development	12	7	4	Department of Census and Statistics (2021), Economic and Social Council (2022), Kasturiarachchi (2020), Roar Media (2016)
Social Support and Safety Nets	Social protection, Child welfare, Family support, Alternative care, Universal child benefit, Cash transfer, Food assistance	20	8	10	Department of Census and Statistics (2021), Economic and Social Council (2022), Pulla (2014)
Emergency and Crisis Management	Disaster management, Humanitarian Aid, Economic stabilization, COVID-19	11	1	6	Economic and Social Council (2022), UN News (2022b)
Other Topics	Census, Divorce	2	0	0	Aluthgedara (2022), Numbers.lk (2023)

* As some reviewed sources have multiple categories, there are overlaps in the number of sources mentioning

Comparative Analysis

Categories	Keywords	Number of Sources	Mentions of CWD	Mentions of Child Protection	Main Sources
Child Protection	Child protection, Abuse, Exploitation, Neglect, Labor, Trafficking, Privacy, Justice, Crime, Survival, Alignment, Ratification, CRC	80	29	80	Banks et al. (2017), Béndek (2013), Delaunay (2011), Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (2018), Hendaus et al. (2020), McCallum (2020), Mehta et al. (2023), Milić et al. (2020), Njelesan et al. (2018), Portilla-Saavedra et al. (2022), Pulla (2014), Rice et al. (2021), Roche (2019), Tsangue et al. (2022)
Disability Inclusion and Rights	Disabilities, Advocacy, Rights, Inclusion, Legal mobilization, Acceptance, Marginalization, Alignment, Ratification, CRPD	79	61	25	Béndek (2013), Chaney (2017), Kamga (2016), McCallum (2020), Milić et al. (2020), More (2023), Njelesan et al. (2018), Rice et al. (2021), Teka (2015), Tsangue et al. (2022)
Healthcare	Healthcare, Health priorities, Universal health coverage, Public health services, Trauma, Mental health services	31	21	20	Béndek (2013), Mehta et al. (2023), Hammadet al. (2023), Lansdown (2022), Sadiki (2022), Sperrin (2018)
Education	Special education, Inclusive education, Learning disabilities, Early childhood development, Child development	15	15	10	Avila (2016), Banks et al. (2017), Lansdown (2022), Szlamka (2022)
Social Support and Safety Nets	Social protection, Child welfare, Family support, Alternative care, Universal child benefit, Cash transfer, Food assistance	44	23	27	Béndek (2013), Delaunay (2011), Mehta et al. (2023), Hammadet al. (2023), Lansdown (2022), More (2023), Sperrin (2018)
Emergency and Crisis Management	Disaster management, Humanitarian Aid, Economic stabilization, COVID-19	23	11	17	Béndek (2013), Hammadet al. (2023), Lansdown (2022)

* As some reviewed sources have multiple categories, there are overlaps in the number of sources mentioning CWD and child protection.

Key Areas Identified

Key Areas	Main Sources
Need for more robust framework	Campbell (2013), Kamga (2016), Liyanage (2017), McCallum (2020), Mendis & Perera (2019), More (2023), Munasinghe (2015), National Child Protection Authority (2019), Pahalawatte (2021), Portilla-Saavedra et al. (2022), Samararatne & Soldatic (2015), Tsangue et al. (2022)
Opportunity for greater coordination and collaboration	Banks et al. (2017), Campbell (2013), Liyanage (2017), Mendis & Perera (2019), More (2023), Munasinghe (2015), Njelesan et al. (2018), Peiris-John et al. (2014), Teka (2015), UNICEF Sri Lanka (2018e)
Importance of increased awareness	Campbell (2013), Hendaus et al. (2020), Kasturiarachchi (2020), Roche (2019)
Priority of accessibility and availability	Chaney (2017), Milić et al. (2020), UNICEF Sri Lanka (2018e), UNICEF Sri Lanka (2018i)
Need for addressing stigma and discrimination	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (2018), Galahitiyawa (2023), Liyanage (2017), More (2023), Rice et al. (2021), Roar Media (2016), UN News (2022b)
Significance of comprehensive data and research	Aluthgedara (2022), Béndek (2013), Chaney (2017), Delaunay (2011), Department of Census and Statistics (2021), Economic and Social Council (2022), Hammad et al. (2023), Mehta et al. (2023), Pulla (2014), Teka (2015), UNICEF Sri Lanka (2018e)

Appendix 4 (Stakeholder Interview Questionnaire)

Introduction

We aim to support the Government of Sri Lanka regarding the alignment of child protection policies and systems in Sri Lanka with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, with a focus on the rights of children with disabilities. We greatly value your perspectives and experiences, which will contribute valuable insights to help identify challenges in Sri Lanka. Your time and willingness to participate in this important endeavor are highly appreciated.

We assure you that any information provided during this interview will be treated with the utmost confidentiality for this project only. The interview will be done virtually through a Zoom call for around 30 minutes. Before proceeding, we kindly request your consent to record this interview for documentation and analysis purposes. Please let us know if you agree to this by providing your verbal or written consent.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to raise them. Thank you for your participation.

Stakeholder Interview Questions

1. What is your job role? Based on your expertise, what specific challenges do you believe need to be addressed in the current child protection policies and systems in Sri Lanka to ensure the rights of children with disabilities are safeguarded effectively?
2. Can you share any experiences or insights from your involvement in projects or initiatives aimed at enhancing the inclusion and protection of children with disabilities in Sri Lanka? What were the key outcomes or lessons learned? What historical initiatives or programs about disability-related matters have existed in Sri Lanka?
3. How do you perceive the level of awareness and understanding among stakeholders, such as government agencies, civil society organizations, and the public, regarding the rights and needs of children with disabilities in Sri Lanka?
4. Considering the impact of financial instability, natural disasters, and pandemics, what unique challenges do you believe children with disabilities face in terms of their

protection and well-being during such circumstances, based on your experience?

5. Considering the current situation in Sri Lanka, what do you see as the most crucial steps that need to be taken to ensure effective child protection policies and systems for children with disabilities, and how can these steps be implemented successfully?

Appendix 5 (Organization and Coding of Thematic Analysis)

Question 1's Finding Data

Interviewees	Challenges											
	Awareness			Societal condition				Alignment				
	Discrimination and stigma associated with disabilities, leading to social exclusion	Traditional beliefs	Disinterest at the national level	Abuse within families and exploitation	Lack of appropriate channels for expressing the feelings and ideas of CWD	Poverty driven by factors such as disabilities and household income	Economic and educational disparities affecting child protection	Absence of a comprehensive and effective child protection framework	Lack of legal enforceability and intersectionality in policy	Limited facilities, services, support, and care for CWD, especially in rural areas	Insufficient early identification and implementation for young CWD	Poor governance practices
1	X	X			X			X		X		
2	X	X										
3	X	X		X				X	X			
4	X	X				X	X		X		X	
5	X	X					X	X		X		
6	X	X	X			X	X			X	X	
7	X	X					X	X	X		X	
8	X	X						X	X			
9	X	X	X		X		X	X	X			
10	X	X	X	X				X	X			
11	X		X	X	X	X	X					X

* The interviewees include individuals with roles such as directors and consultants from NGOs and NPOs, educators, and law professionals.

Question 2's Finding Data

Interviewees	Experiences in initiatives														
	Experiences or insights from involvement							Key outcomes or lessons learned					Historical initiatives or programs		
	Advocacy for CWD inclusion in children's laws and emphasizing abilities	Promotion of community-based services and adapted accommodations	Addressing education hurdles, particularly for children with learning disabilities	Difficulties in changing perspectives, raising awareness, and fighting discrimination	Shortages of facilities, resources, and qualified personnel	Historical impact such as Civil War, especially on men and families	Historical social welfare approaches and policy implementation issues in disability matters	Countering misconceptions and social attitudes towards disability inclusion and child protection	Advancing inclusivity and equal opportunities for CWD	Acknowledging unique needs, including CWD opinions and parental input	Addressing outdated practices such as segregating children based on perceived educability, which causes literacy levels but with limitations	Sustained collaborative efforts for an inclusive society for CWD	Complex interplay between financial constraints, power dynamics, and limited disability awareness	Government initiatives such as IoT Center, inclusive higher education, and special school units for CWD	Initiatives focusing on inclusion and protection of CWD and their upskilling for financial independence
1	X	X	X		X			X	X					X	
2				X				X	X						
3		X		X	X	X		X	X						X
4	X		X	X	X			X	X	X	X				
5			X	X	X			X	X		X				
6		X	X	X	X			X	X	X		X			X
7	X			X			X	X	X			X			
8	X			X			X	X	X					X	X
9			X	X	X			X	X			X		X	X
10	X		X				X	X	X	X		X		X	X
11	X	X			X			X					X	X	X

* The interviewees include individuals with roles such as directors and consultants from NGOs and NPOs, educators, and law professionals.

Question 3's Finding Data

Interviewees	Level of awareness and understanding									
	Government agencies		Civil society organizations				The public			
	Gaps between disability rights understanding and practical policy implementation	Need for enhancing awareness of local authorities through accessible formats	Importance of DPOs' direct involvement	Challenges in DPO collaboration and unity	Awareness gaps between Colombo-based and provincial groups	Financial constraints and challenges with international agencies	Limited awareness and understanding of CWD's rights and needs	Lack of prominent awareness initiatives and support measures	Insufficient inclusive environments and accessibility	Pandemic and financial instability's impact
1	X		X	X			X	X	X	X
2	X						X	X		
3	X						X	X	X	
4	X		X	X		X	X	X		
5	X						X	X	X	X
6	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
7	X	X			X	X	X	X		X
8	X	X			X		X	X		
9	X						X	X		
10	X						X	X	X	
11	X						X	X	X	

* The interviewees include individuals with roles such as directors and consultants from NGOs and NPOs, educators, and law professionals.

Question 4's Finding Data

Interviewees	Unique challenges under financial instability, natural disasters, and pandemics												
	Infrastructure and Resource Challenges					Advocacy and Rights					Cultural and Religious Influences		
	Inadequate facilities and support and resource deficits in institutions	Community-based support lacking	Increased risk of abandonment for CWD due to parental hardships	Educational disruptions due to commute issues based on economic uncertainty, illnesses, and parental or grandparental caregiving issues	Low transparency and inaccuracy of statistics and data	Advocacy for CWD rights; policy change needed for unique needs	Deepened disparities based on non-disabled education prioritized within families	Promoting self-sufficiency alongside acknowledging external support and education, while avoiding unsustainable aid-induced dependency	Increased victimization and vulnerability in emergencies faced by CWD, including limited communication	Visionary deficit, corruption, and mismanagement in politics	Buddhism's influence on family-based ideas, potentially affecting CWD's care	Overemphasis on humanities subjects and limitations	Impoverished children's ambitions, focused on short-term gains, leading to adverse effects on the environment and society
1	X	X				X					X		
2			X		X						X		
3	X								X				
4	X			X									
5	X			X		X							
6	X				X	X		X					
7	X					X			X				
8	X					X			X				
9	X	X				X	X		X				
10	X					X			X				
11										X		X	X

* The interviewees include individuals with roles such as directors and consultants from NGOs and NPOs, educators, and law professionals.

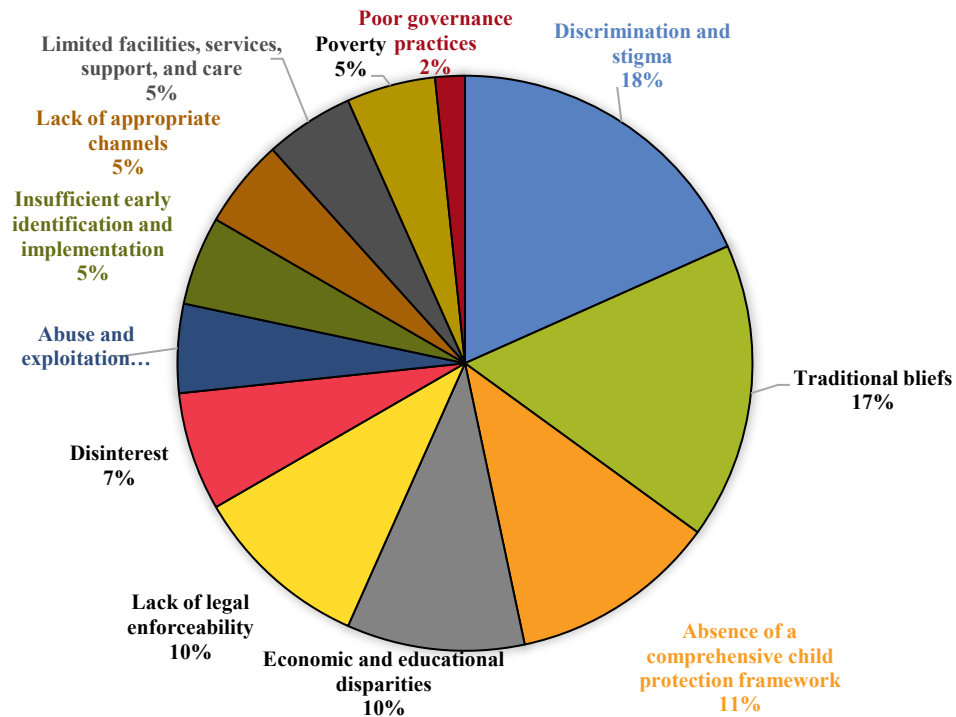
Question 5's Finding Data

Interviewees	Crucial steps for successful implementations															
	Training and awareness		Collaboration and coordination					Holistic approach					National Policy			Data and evidence
	Emphasize the CWD's needs for the entire society to promote their protection and rights awareness	Provide practical training and education government officials and professionals on disability inclusion and child protection	Establish cross-ministerial collaboration for policy enhancements and comprehensive systems	Foster collaboration among government ministries, NGOs, and INGOs for holistic CWD support ecosystem	Engage government ministries and international partners in active participation	Establish professional networks in institutions and schools, including workshops for effective support	Establish inclusive systems for CWD, including continuous improvements, effective governance through expertise, and stronger law enforcement	Ensure mental and physical accessibility and standardized child protection	Develop empathetic policies for inclusivity, considering history	Encourage a positive mindset shift about CWD's strengths	Advocacy for strict actions against perpetrators and special courts in child protection policy	Transform frameworks into action with strong leadership	Connect funds to policy progress, ensuring transparent evaluation and reporting	Prioritize accurate CWD data collection for decision-making, awareness, and funding support	Establish a sustainable monitoring system with NGO/INGO involvement	Utilize evidence-based approaches for crafting disability inclusion and child protection policies
1		X	X	X	X	X	X			X						
2		X					X			X		X	X			X
3	X	X									X					
4		X	X	X		X	X			X			X			X
5	X	X				X	X									
6					X			X			X	X				
7			X			X	X	X			X					
8		X	X	X		X										
9				X		X					X			X		
10	X			X	X	X						X				
11	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X					X	X		X

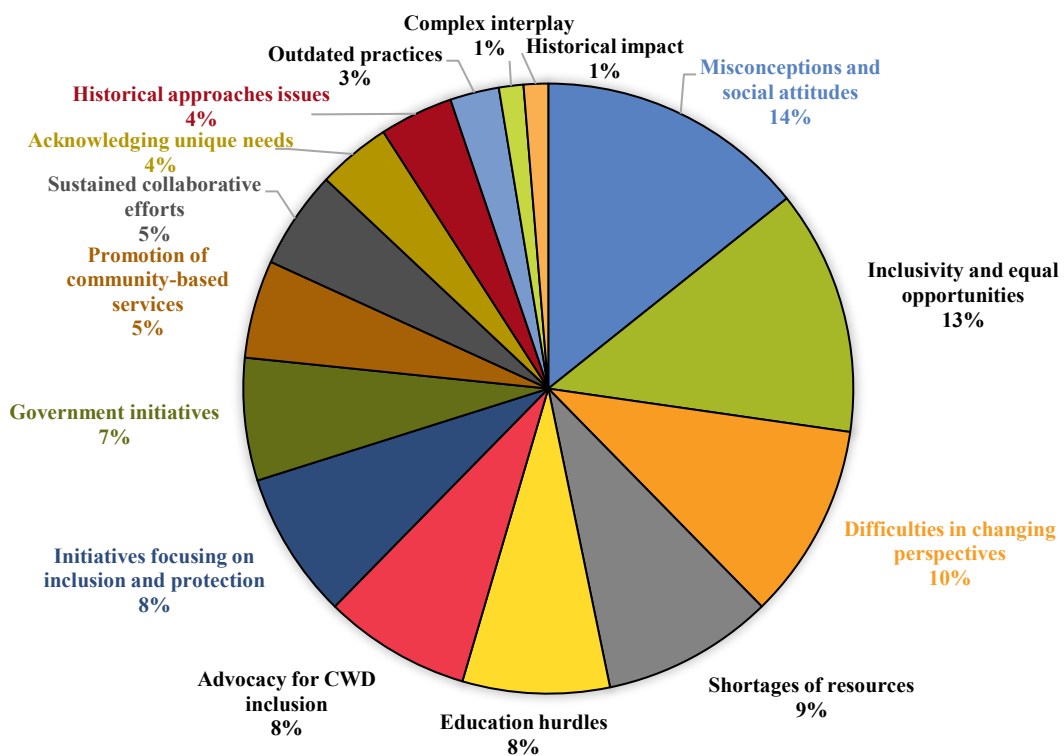
* The interviewees include individuals with roles such as directors and consultants from NGOs and NPOs, educators, and law professionals.

Pie Charts: (Organization and Coding of Thematic Analysis)

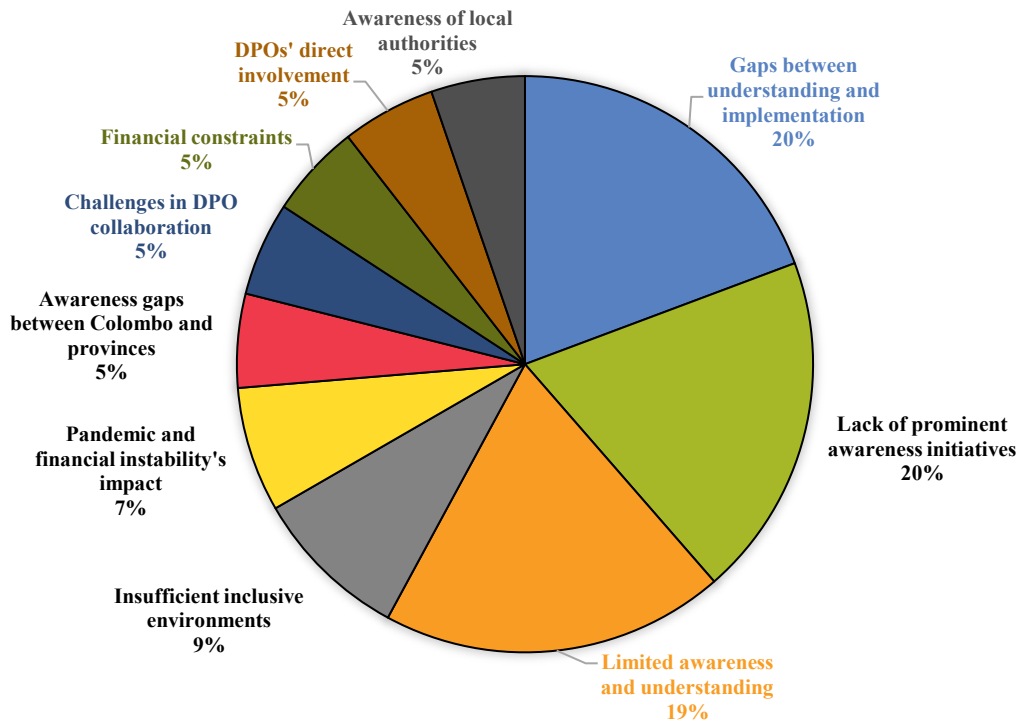
Question 1's Finding



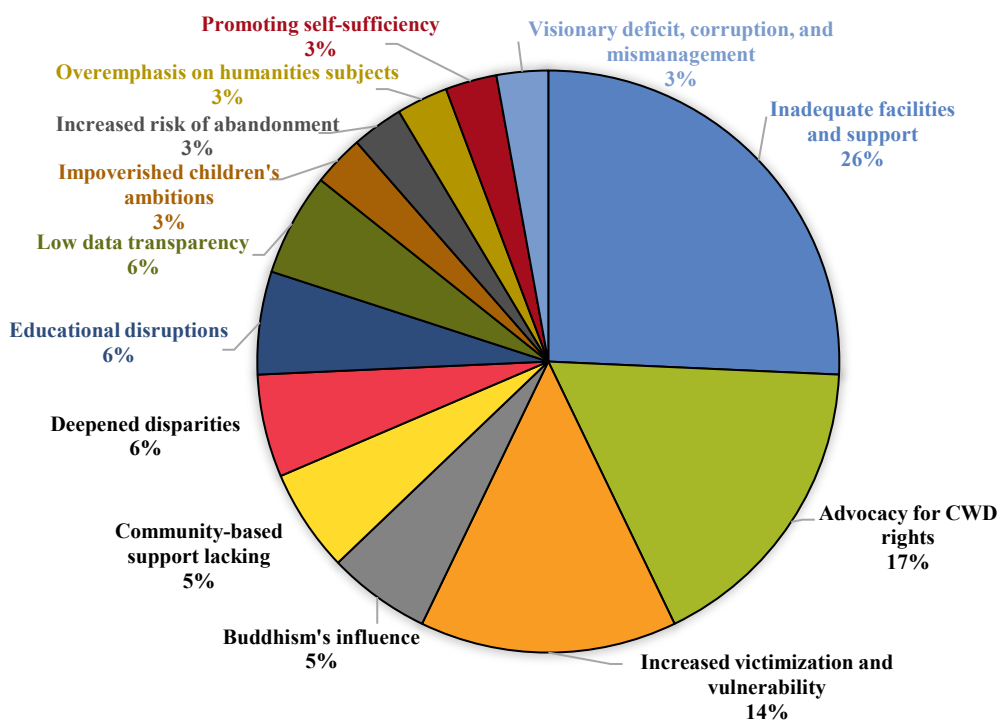
Question 2's Finding



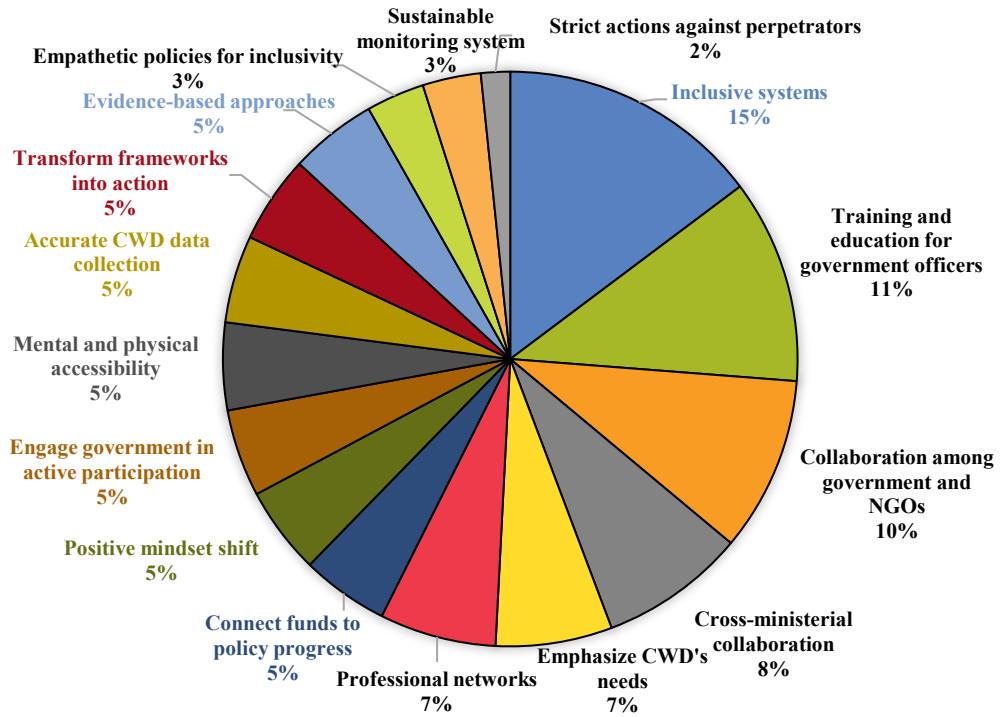
Question 3's Finding



Question 4's Finding



Question 5's Finding



- ¹ By adopting the expert interview approach, the project offered practical insights and contextually relevant recommendations to facilitate positive change for children with disabilities in Sri Lanka, enhancing understanding of current aspects and stakeholder perspectives. Döringer, S. (2021). 'The problem-centred expert interview'. Combining qualitative interviewing approaches for investigating implicit expert knowledge. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 24(3), 265–278. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2020.1766777>
- ² The National Child Protection Authority, established under the National Child Protection Authority Act No. 50 of 1998, handles ensuring the protection, promotion, and development of CWD's rights. National Child Protection Authority. (2019, October). *National Policy on Child Protection*. Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social Empowerment of Sri Lanka. <https://childprotection.gov.lk/images/pdfs/acts-guidelines/2020.12.31%20National%20Policy%20on%20Child%20Protection.pdf>
- ³ Signed the CRC in 1990. The International Monitoring Committee on the CRC observes violations of this obligation as a state.
- ⁴ Lansdown, G. (2022). Article 23: The rights of children with disabilities. *Children's Well-Being: Indicators and Research*, 25(21), 193–203. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-84647-3_21
- ⁵ The act aims to ensure equal opportunities, non-discrimination, and the full participation of PWD in society.
- ⁶ Signed the CRPD in 2007. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities supervises compliance. Lansdown, G. (2022). Article 23: The rights of children with disabilities. *Children's Well-Being: Indicators and Research*, 25(21), 193–203. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-84647-3_21
- ⁷ The key areas have been identified as needing enhancement in the existing policies by referring to policy-related perspectives obtained from the following resources:
Campbell, F. K. (2013). A review of disability law and legal mobilisation in Sri Lanka [Draft 2]. *LST Review*, 23(308). https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2084565
- Peiris-John, R. J., Attanayake, S., Daskon, L., Wickremasinghe, A. R., & Ameratunga, S. (2014). Disability studies in Sri Lanka: priorities for action. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 36(20), 1742–1748. <https://doi.org/10.3109/09638288.2013.864714>
- Samararatne, D. W. V. A., & Soldatic, K. (2015). Inclusions and exclusions in law: experiences of women with disability in rural and war-affected areas in Sri Lanka. *Disability & Society*, 30(5), 759–772. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2015.1021760>
- Munasinghe, I. (2015). The absolute protection available for the disabled children under the prevention of domestic violence law; Sri Lankan perspective. *8th International Research Conference, KDU*, 126–130. <http://ir.kdu.ac.lk/handle/345/1374>
- Liyanage, C. (2017). Sociocultural construction of disability in Sri Lanka: Charity to rights-based approach. *Inclusive Learning and Educational Equity*, 3, 251–265. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-55224-8_16
- ⁸ UNICEF Sri Lanka. (2018e, June 21). *Child protection*. Retrieved September 12, 2023, from <https://www.unicef.org/srilanka/child-protection>
- ⁹ UNICEF Sri Lanka. (2018i, June 22). *Child survival & development in early childhood*. Retrieved September 12, 2023, from <https://www.unicef.org/srilanka/child-survival-development-early-childhood>
- ¹⁰ Milić, N., Rasiti, G., Latić, E., Kalem, M., & Fazlić, M. (2020). Deinstitutionalisation of children with disabilities: Process, progress and challenges in South-East Europe. *Global Campus Human Rights Journal*, 4(2), 375–402. <http://doi.org/20.500.11825/2039>
- ¹¹ Chaney, P. (2017). Comparative analysis of civil society and state discourse on disabled people's rights and welfare in Southeast Asia 2010–16. *Asian Studies Review*, 41(3), 405–423. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2017.1336612>
- ¹² Chaney, P. (2017). Comparative analysis of civil society and state discourse on disabled people's rights and welfare in Southeast Asia 2010–16. *Asian Studies Review*, 41(3), 405–423. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2017.1336612>
- ¹³ Liyanage, C. (2017). Sociocultural construction of disability in Sri Lanka: charity to rights-based approach. *Inclusive Learning and Educational Equity*, 3, 251–265. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-55224-8_16
- ¹⁴ UN News. (2022b, November 8). *UN ramps up humanitarian appeal for life-saving assistance to 3.4 million Sri Lankans*. United Nations. Retrieved September 12, 2023, from <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/11/1130332>
- ¹⁵ Roar Media. (2016, November 4). *The plight of Sri Lanka's special needs children*. Retrieved September 12, 2023, from <https://roar.media/english/life/reports/plight-sri-lankas-special-needs-children>
- ¹⁶ Galahitiyawa, S. T. L. H. (2023). 'That's my journey': what motivated me to conduct disability research? *Disability & Society*, 38(6), 1084–1088. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2023.2181771>
- ¹⁷ Rice, J. G., Bjargardóttir, H. B., & Sigurjónsdóttir, H. B. (2021). Child protection, disability and obstetric violence: Three case studies from Iceland. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(1), 158. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18010158>
- ¹⁸ More, R. (2023). Inclusive child welfare services, disabled children, and their families: insights from a European comparison of social policy and social (work) practice in Austria, Iceland, and Ireland. *Ireland, European Journal of Social Work*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2023.2219033>
- ¹⁹ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. (2018). *Latin America and the Caribbean 30 years after the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child*. <https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/44272-latin-america-and-caribbean-30-years-after-adoption-convention-rights-child#:~:text=Almost%2030%20years%20after%20the%20signature%20of%20the,the%20Convention%20has%20been%20applied%20in%20the%20region>
- ²⁰ Campbell, F. K. (2013). A review of disability law and legal mobilisation in Sri Lanka [Draft 2]. *LST Review*. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2084565
- ²¹ The following is an example: Kasturiarachchi, C. (2020). Rights for education: school support and education development of differently-abled students with special education needs in the Sri Lankan government schools. *International Journal Of All Research Writings*, (11), 38–48. <http://ijarw.com/Users/ManuScript/ManuScriptDetails/af9dafdc-f5f0-472c-839b-3ed044acc6fd>
- ²² Roche, S. (2019). Childhoods in policy: A critical analysis of national child protection policy in the Philippines. *Children & Society*, 33(2), 95–110. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/chso.12295>
- ²³ Hendaus, M. A., Al-Khuzaei, A. M., Samarah, O., Hamad, S. G., Selim, B. A., Ansari, W. E. (2020). Child abuse and neglect in a rapidly developing country Parents' perspectives. *Journal of family medicine and primary care*, 9(6), 3053–3059. https://doi.org/10.4103/jfmpe.jfmpe_971_19
- ²⁴ Article 12(4) of the Sri Lankan Constitution (1978) mandates actions for the well-being of individuals with disabilities. Munasinghe, I. (2015). The absolute protection available for the disabled children under the prevention of domestic violence law; Sri Lankan Perspective. *8th International Research Conference, KDU*, 126–130. <http://ir.kdu.ac.lk/handle/345/1374>
- ²⁵ The National Policy on Child Protection administered by the National Child Protection Authority. National Child Protection Authority. (2019, October). *National Policy on Child Protection*. Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social Empowerment of Sri Lanka. <https://childprotection.gov.lk/images/pdfs/acts-guidelines/2020.12.31%20National%20Policy%20on%20Child%20Protection.pdf>
- ²⁶ Liyanage, C. (2017). Sociocultural construction of disability in Sri Lanka: charity to rights-based approach. *Inclusive Learning and Educational Equity*, 3, 251–265. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-55224-8_16
- ²⁷ Mendis, P., & Perera, B. (2019). The disability policy brief for law makers, administrators and other decision makers in Sri Lanka. International Centre for Ethnic Studies.
- ²⁸ Pahalawatte, A. (2021, November 20). *Protecting every child in Sri Lanka*. Groundviews. Retrieved September 12, 2023, from <https://groundviews.org/2021/11/20/protecting-every-child-in-sri-lanka/>
- ²⁹ Munasinghe, I. (2015). The absolute protection available for the disabled children under the prevention of domestic violence law; Sri Lankan Perspective. *8th International Research Conference, KDU*, 126–130. <http://ir.kdu.ac.lk/handle/345/1374>

- ³⁰ More, R. (2023). Inclusive child welfare services, disabled children, and their families: insights from a European comparison of social policy and social (work) practice in Austria, Iceland, and Ireland. *Ireland, European Journal of Social Work*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2023.2219033>
- ³¹ The Children and Young Persons Ordinance, specifically Clause 23, serves the purpose of establishing juvenile courts to oversee juvenile offenders and ensure the protection of children and young persons. On November 17th, 2022, the Sri Lankan parliament approved amendments to this ordinance, as outlined in the July 18th, 2022, issuance, with changes made to Clause 23.
- ³² Parliament of Sri Lanka. (2022, September 28). *Age of a person acknowledged as a child raised from 16 years to 18 years*. Retrieved September 12, 2023, from <https://www.parliament.lk/en/committee-news/view/2773?category=33>
- ³³ UNICEF Sri Lanka. (2022a, November 24). *Child welfare and child justice in Sri Lanka—No time like the present for reform* [Press release]. <https://www.unicef.org/srilanka/press-releases/child-welfare-and-child-justice-sri-lanka-no-time-present-reform>
- ³⁴ More, R. (2023). Inclusive child welfare services, disabled children, and their families: insights from a European comparison of social policy and social (work) practice in Austria, Iceland, and Ireland. *Ireland, European Journal of Social Work*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2023.2219033>
- ³⁵ More, R. (2023). Inclusive child welfare services, disabled children, and their families: insights from a European comparison of social policy and social (work) practice in Austria, Iceland, and Ireland. *Ireland, European Journal of Social Work*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2023.2219033>
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- ³⁷ Kanga, S. D. (2016). Disability rights in South Africa: prospects for their realisation under the White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. *South African Journal on Human Rights*, 32(3), 569–580. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02587203.2016.1264109>
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- ³⁹ Tsangue, G. T., Awa, J. C., Nsono, J., Ayima, C. W., & Tih, P. M. (2022). Non-disclosure of abuse in children and young adults with disabilities: Reasons and mitigation strategies Northwest Region of Cameroon. *African Journal of Disability*, 11, a1025. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ajod.v11i0.1025>
- ⁴⁰ Portilla-Saavedra, D., Pinto-Cortez, C., Guerra, C., & Cárdenas, F. P. (2022). Victimization by caregivers: Prevalence and risk factors in Chilean children and adolescents. *Child Adolesc Psychiatry Ment Health*, 16(74). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13034-022-00509-3>
- ⁴¹ World Health Organization. (n.d.). *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)*. Retrieved September 12, 2023, from <https://www.who.int/standards/classifications/international-classification-of-functioning-disability-and-health>
- ⁴² Members of the European Union (EU) adopted the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030 and the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child. Others in the European Economic Area often comply with EU policy regarding human rights.
- ⁴³ McCallum, R. (2020, October). *Research Report: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: An assessment of Australia's level of compliance*. Australia Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2020-10/Research%20Report%20-%20The%20United%20Nations%20Convention%20on%20the%20Rights%20of%20Persons%20with%20Disabilities%20-%20An%20Assessment%20of%20Australia%E2%80%99s%20Level%20of%20Compliance_1.pdf
- ⁴⁴ UNICEF Sri Lanka. (2018e, June 21). *Child protection*. Retrieved September 12, 2023, from <https://www.unicef.org/srilanka/child-protection>
- ⁴⁵ More, R. (2023). Inclusive child welfare services, disabled children, and their families: insights from a European comparison of social policy and social (work) practice in Austria, Iceland, and Ireland. *Ireland, European Journal of Social Work*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2023.2219033>
- ⁴⁶ Teka, B. (2015). *Child Rights Protection in Ethiopia and Kenya: A comparative analysis*. [Master's thesis, Addis Ababa University]. AAU Institutional Repository. <http://etd.aau.edu.et/bitstream/handle/123456789/30204/Firehiwot%20Girma.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- ⁴⁷ Banks, L. M., Kelly, S. A., Kyegombe, N., Kuper, H., & Devries, K. (2017). "If he could speak, he would be able to point out who does those things to him": Experiences of violence and access to child protection among children with disabilities in Uganda and Malawi. *PLoS ONE*, 12(9), e0183736. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0183736>
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- ⁴⁹ Aluthgedara, M. (2022, November 10). *Census on population and housing next year*. Daily News. Retrieved September 12, 2023, from <https://archives1.dailynews.lk/2022/11/10/local/290866/census-population-and-housing-next-year>
- ⁵⁰ Sri Lanka Department of Census and Statistics. (2021, October 1). *Census of children in child care institutions 2019 Final Report*. <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/OtherCensusandSurveys/StatisticalInformation/Census/CensusofChildreninChildCareInstitutions2019Final>
- ⁵¹ Economic and Social Council. (2022). *E/ICEF/2022/P/L.37*. https://www.unicef.org/executiveboard/media/12511/file/2022-PL37-Sri_Lanka_CPD-EN-ODS.pdf
- ⁵² UNICEF Sri Lanka. (2018e, June 21). *Child protection*. Retrieved September 12, 2023, from <https://www.unicef.org/srilanka/child-protection>
- ⁵³ In 2021, according to the collection and analysis of disaggregated data from the KidsRights Index 2022 Report, the Czech Republic, Eswatini, and Luxembourg improved their scores on this indicator, while Poland and Switzerland saw declines, and Tunisia's record remained unchanged.
- ⁵⁴ KidsRights. (2022). *The KidsRights index 2022 report*. <https://files.kidsrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/18212510/KidsRights-Index-2022-Report.pdf>
- ⁵⁵ Teka, B. (2015). *Child Rights Protection in Ethiopia and Kenya: A comparative analysis*. [Master's thesis, Addis Ababa University]. AAU Institutional Repository. <http://etd.aau.edu.et/bitstream/handle/123456789/30204/Firehiwot%20Girma.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- ⁵⁶ Pulla, V. (2014). Child protection system reform in the regional consultation of the South Asian nations. *The Malaysian Journal of Social Administration*, 10, 29–44. <https://doi.org/10.22452/mjsa.vol10no1.2>
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- ⁵⁸ Delaunay, V. (2011). Improving knowledge on child abandonment and care in Africa: A demographic contribution to the achievement of child protection. *African Population Studies*, 25(1), 73–94. <https://doi.org/10.11564/25-1-268>
- ⁵⁹ Bédek, J. (2013, June 14). *Country report on Hungary - for the study on "Member States' policies for children with disabilities" study*. European Parliament. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/474424/IPOL-LIBE_ET\(2013\)474424_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/474424/IPOL-LIBE_ET(2013)474424_EN.pdf)
- ⁶⁰ Mehta, D., Kelly, A. B., Laurens, K. R., Haslam, D., Williams, K. E., Walsh, K., Baker, P. R. A., Carter, H. E., Khawaja, N. G., Zelenko, O., & Mathews, B. (2023). Child maltreatment and long-term physical and mental health outcomes: An exploration of biopsychosocial determinants and implications for prevention. *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*, 54, 421–435. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10578-021-01258-8>
- ⁶¹ Hammad, M., Foster, A. M., Mowafi, I. M. E., Aissaoui, A., Elamuragan, K., Rajendra, K. L., Clark, E., Rajendra, K. L., & Kobeissi, L. (2023). Exploring the feasibility of establishing a core set of sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health indicators in humanitarian settings: results from a multi-methods assessment in Jordan. *Reproductive Health*, 20, 56. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-023-01589-w>
- ⁶² Despite being introduced in the 1980s, CBR programs, designed for early identification and interventions, have not been adequately implemented due to human and financial resource constraints. Lacking continuous habilitation programs for CWD from birth can worsen their conditions, potentially causing secondary disabilities that impact their education, employment, and daily lives.

⁶² Many countries face challenges in providing effective child protection and disability inclusion systems for CWD. Some North European countries such as Sweden, Norway, and Finland, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand have more advanced systems. For instance, in Sri Lanka, child protection spending was only 0.28% of the budget in 2021, while it varies by country.

UNICEF. (2021). *Child protection strategy 2021-2030*. <https://www.unicef.org/media/104416/file/Child-Protection-Strategy-2021.pdf>

UNICEF Child Protection Programme Division. (2020). *The contribution public finance for children can make to realizing child protection objectives*.

<https://www.unicef.org/media/93996/file/PF4C-for-Child-Protection-2021.pdf>

UNICEF Sri Lanka. (2022c, June). *Budget brief: Child protection sector*.

<https://www.unicef.org/srilanka/media/2821/file/BUDGET%20BRIEF:%20CHILD%20PROTECTION%20SECTOR%20SRI%20LANKA%202021.pdf>

⁶³ Here are some examples of costs for children:

Nepal: Expanding child grants to all children up to the age of 17 by 2035 would cost less than 0.7% of GDP yearly.

Human Rights Watch. (2023, February 1). *Nepal's social protection system reinforces inequality*. Retrieved September 12, 2023, from

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/02/01/nepals-social-protection-system-reinforces-inequality#:~:text=According%20to%20a%202021%20UNICEF%20study%2C%20expanding%20the,less%20than%200.7%20percent%20of%20GDP%20a%20year>

Zambia: Although child protection program allocation increased to 4.3% of GDP and 11.7% of the budget in 2022, "core" interventions are limited, with only 0.2% of GDP and 0.6% of the budget, potentially limiting their impact.

UNICEF Zambia. (2022). *UNICEF Zambia child protection budget brief 2022: Unmasking investments in child protection*.

<https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/11331/file/UNICEF-Zambia-Child-Protection-Budget-Brief-2022.pdf>

⁶⁴ There exist many departments and ministries tasked with policy implementation; however, a lack of effective coordination persists, with the primary responsibility resting on the ministry to which social welfare is assigned (currently, the Department of Social Services at the Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social Empowerment).

⁶⁵ It would be possible to incorporate priorities of CWD into the current structure of the National Council of Persons with Disabilities and the National Council for Child & Youth Welfare.

National Council for Child & Youth Welfare. (n.d.). *About us*. Retrieved September 12, 2023, from <http://www.nccyw.org/index.php/about-us/>

National Secretariat For Persons With Disabilities. (n.d.). *About Us*. Retrieved September 12, 2023, from <https://www.nspd.gov.lk/index.php/about-us#:~:text=The%20National%20Council%20for%20Persons,part%20of%20the%20national%20development>

⁶⁶ The child protection system's multiple working groups, including drafting, UN reporting, and others, function in parallel and occasionally overlapping domains.

⁶⁷ This should include installing focal points or help desks to enhance disability services.

⁶⁸ Data collection would be necessary to adjust essential data, collection ways, and data coding with the Department of Census and Statistics, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, and other relevant ministries and agencies.

Department of Census and Statistics. (n.d.). *Vision & mission*. Government of Sri Lanka. Retrieved September 12, 2023, from

http://www.statistics.gov.lk/about_us/vision_mission

⁶⁹ This could also be aligned with maternal and child health programs. Limited chances to identify disabilities in early childhood might lead to an amplification of their impact as the child matures.

⁷⁰ This could involve the National Council for Persons with Disabilities, the National General Secretariat, and the Disability Organisations Joint Front, an umbrella body of DPOs in Sri Lanka founded in June 2001. National Secretariat For Persons With Disabilities. (n.d.). *About Us*. Retrieved September 12, 2023, from <https://www.nspd.gov.lk/index.php/about-us#:~:text=The%20National%20Council%20for%20Persons,part%20of%20the%20national%20development>. Disability Organizations Joint Front. (n.d.). *Overview*. Retrieved September 12, 2023, from <https://www.dojf.org/en/overview/>

⁷¹ A small-scale partnership program might require a budget ranging from 1,617,500 LKR to 3,235,000 LKR (US\$5,000 to US\$10,000) for initial mapping, communication, and coordination efforts. The 2021 budget estimate at the central level allocated LKR 10.7 billion to the child protection sector. For 2021, child protection expenditure was 0.07% of GDP. UNICEF Sri Lanka. (2021a, June). *Budget brief: Child protection sector | Sri Lanka 2021*.

<https://www.unicef.org/srilanka/media/2821/file/BUDGET%20BRIEF:%20CHILD%20PROTECTION%20SECTOR%20SRI%20LANKA%202021.pdf>

⁷² The government could ensure compliance through incentives such as awards for integration into media regulations, monitoring with penalties for violations, stakeholder collaboration, training, awareness campaigns, and alignment with global standards.

⁷³ State-owned media professionals include Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation, Independent Television Network Limited, Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation, and Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Limited.

⁷⁴ The estimated costs might range from 1,617,500 LKR to 16,175,000 LKR (US\$5,000 to US\$15,000).

⁷⁵ It is necessary to involve government officials from the ministries to which social affairs, education, communication, and justice are assigned to collectively drive the paradigm shift towards a human rights-based approach for individuals with disabilities through media guidelines, a national campaign, accessibility integration, and inclusive education.

⁷⁶ Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka. (n.d.). *History*. Retrieved September 12, 2023, from <https://www.hrcsl.lk/about/history/>

⁷⁷ It is required of government officials from the Ministry of Justice, local government representatives, bar associations, and education department representatives to collaboratively implement the legal literacy and CWD rights education initiative, as well as MWCASE representatives.

⁷⁸ It would be pivotal to collaborate with the Department of Nutrition at the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture, and other relevant authorities.

Nutrition Division. (2023, August 4). *Nutrition Division & FBDG*. Ministry of Health of Sri Lanka. Retrieved September 12, 2023, from

<https://nutrition.health.gov.lk/english/about-us/>

Ministry of Agriculture of Sri Lanka. (2023, September 12). *About Us*. Retrieved September 12, 2023, from <https://www.agrimin.gov.lk/web/index.php/en/about-us/overview123>

⁷⁹ The estimated costs might range from 1,617,500 LKR to 3,235,000 LKR (US\$5,000 to US\$10,000).

⁸⁰ The estimated costs might range from 323,500 LKR to 647,000 LKR (US\$1,000 to US\$2,000).

⁸¹ By adopting the expert interview approach, the project offered practical insights and contextually relevant recommendations to facilitate positive change for children with disabilities in Sri Lanka, enhancing understanding of current aspects and stakeholder perspectives. Döringer, S. (2021). 'The problem-centred expert interview'. *Combining qualitative interviewing approaches for investigating implicit expert knowledge*. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 24(3), 265–278. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2020.1766777>