

Disability and Disaster Risk Management: Why Everyone Wins When No One is Left Behind

Over the last ten years, crises like the 3/11 triple disaster and spread of COVID-19 across Japan have exacerbated accessibility issues born out of the nation's past, creating difficulties for disabled people in the present and anxieties about the future. In this presentation, I consider how such crises afford us opportunities to identify and resolve barriers for diverse demographics of disabled people.

My analysis highlights how inadequate installation and inappropriate use of barrier-free facilities such as ramps and elevators in public venues has prevented many disabled people from effectively navigating moments of crisis, leading some to rely on friends, family, and caregivers for support. As 'support networks' have collapsed due to social, political, economic, and cultural obligations, particularly vulnerable populations have turned to assisted living facilities as a means of survival. However, many facilities have long grappled with funding problems and a lack of willing workers. Accordingly, their residents have often been exposed to neglect, abuse, and other forms of violence.

Aware of the situation, government officials have instituted emergency policies to provide disabled people and assisted living facilities with flexible financing. And yet, as activists have argued, those policies have often failed to pan out in practice. The future of disability in Japan remains uncertain. But as I argue, now is our chance to intervene. By reflecting on the origins of barriers to access in Japan's past and working to resolve them in the present, we can help to create an inclusive future.