

# **Policy influencing 2024 annual summary**

Key achievements in Asia

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# Introduction

This report is a summary of the key successes in policy influencing achieved across Asia in 2024, led by the country offices in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, with support from the Policy and Global Advocacy team, Campaigns team, Global Technical Leads and other teams. The report aims to provide an overview of the most significant achievements, although it is not exhaustive and there are many other examples of progress made towards Sightsavers' policy influencing goals which have not been included in the interests of keeping the summary at a manageable length. Sightsavers recognises that policy change requires long-term investment from multiple actors including government, civil society and international NGO partners, and it is important to note that these achievements are not solely attributed to the input of Sightsavers. For a comprehensive overview of Sightsavers' work on policy influencing in 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 please refer to the [Policy influencing data hub](#).

## Bangladesh

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### Development of a comprehensive district eye care plan

In 2024, a comprehensive district eye care plan was developed following the World Health Organisation's Inclusive People Centered Eye Care (IPCEC) approach for all programme districts. The civil surgeon office of our programme districts has proactively been involved in developing the district level eye care plan and collecting the cataract Surgical Rate data. Sightsavers and its partners are coordinating with district administrations to make the District Disability Committees functional in 16 programme districts and support the roll out of the district eye care plan. In spite of the many challenges and changes in the political situation, committee meetings took place in Khulna, Kurigram, Rangpur and Narsinghdi districts in 2024, with representation from civil society organisations, community-based organisation and Organisations for Persons with Disabilities.

### Drafting of a Small and Medium Enterprise policy

As part of the Futuremakers project, in 2024 Sightsavers supported the publication and dissemination of two studies on Bangladesh's Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) policy, together the SME Foundation, Ministry of Industries, and the central bank of Bangladesh. Building on the findings of these studies, the SME Foundation initiated the drafting of revisions to the SME policy, and Sightsavers was invited to share further recommendations to strengthen the provisions for people with disabilities. The draft policy is now at the review stage in the Ministry of Industries. In addition to this, the Bangladesh Bank has initiated a revision of the Cottage, Small and Micro Enterprise loan policy, where Sightsavers also strongly recommended considering persons with disabilities through reduced interest rates and flexible collateral and mortgage criteria for certain loans.

## Integration of the Washington Group Questions into the Labour Force Survey

In 2023, the Washington Group Questions were integrated into the Labour Force Survey in Bangladesh. Since then, the survey has provided disability disaggregated data in the national statistics on employment, a huge step forward for understanding the extent of disability inclusion in the labour market. The survey is supposed to be conducted quarterly, but due to the political situation in 2024, only one survey was done in the year, and the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics has yet to publish the full report. Sightsavers will continue to engage with the International Labour Organisation, Bangladesh Business Disability Network and Organisations for Persons with Disabilities to support the roll out of the labour force survey incorporating disability disaggregated data in 2025.

## Allocation of funding to promote inclusive education

Through the Disability Inclusive Development consortium, Sightsavers is working to enhance the enrolment of children with disabilities and ensure that the education system in Bangladesh is accessible and of high quality for all children. In 2023, the consortium successfully influenced district and upazila-level education officials to allocate a portion of the School Level Improvement Plan (SLIP) funds for children with disabilities in 27 out of the 45 project schools. Following on-going advocacy, in 2024 District Education Officers issued government orders mandating that all 2,444 Government Primary Schools allocate a portion of their SLIP funds to promote inclusive education and support disability inclusion. This is a step forward for inclusive education across the whole of Bangladesh.

## Launch of the Bengali Braille Guidelines

Sightsavers has forged strong strategic partnerships with the JPUF (National Foundation for the Development of the Disabled) and Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW). The JPUF is the key agency that upholds and coordinates initiatives to ensure the rights of persons with disabilities, as per the Rights and Protection for Persons with Disabilities (RPPD) Act 2013 and the National Action Plan on Disabilities. Sightsavers organised a two-day residential workshop on finalising the Bengali Braille Guidelines in partnership with the JPUF and the MoSW in May 2024, attended by the Honourable Minister of Social Welfare, along with representatives of OPDs, campaign partners, and disability organisations. This workshop provided the necessary understanding among MoSW officials and paved the way for approving and gazetting the long-awaited national braille guideline. Following the workshop, the draft guidelines were published on the JPUF website to seek final feedback and stakeholder recommendations by the end of June. Finally, the guidelines were approved through official directives from the MoSW on 25 September 2024.

# India

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## Development of state eye health advocacy and policy engagement plans

In 2024, state eye health networks in five programme states developed their contextual annual advocacy and policy engagement plans, actively leading policy dialogues and awareness sessions to push the state Universal Eye Health (UEH) agenda forward. At the National Eye Health Conference in July 2024, hosted by Sightsavers India and Vision 2020, we presented eight critical research and program learning papers, influencing national and global policy discussions on geographical equity and localisation of eye care, women's eye health, vision-induced road accidents, government funding, policy gaps, and emerging global eye health targets. With over 1000 stakeholders, including policymakers, practitioners, and public health specialists, the conference debated critical issues like human resource capacities, digital disruptions, climate-compliant eye care, and taxation in eye health. Sightsavers India's contributions helped shape policy discussions, strengthening the national UEH agenda. National and state governments have taken the inputs and recommendations from the network and have committed to hold discussions during the National Eye Health Action Plan redevelopment.

## Embedding of driver eye screening in road safety initiatives

As a key member of the National Vision & Road Safety Alliance (VARSA), Sightsavers India spearheaded the high-impact national consultation in 2024 at the Indian Institute of Technology in Chennai, championing a Vision Zero Death approach to road safety by integrating eye care into road safety policies. Bringing together government leaders, civil society, industry, transport, academia, and eye health experts, the consultation explored vision-induced road safety risks, showcased best practices, and fostered multi-sectoral collaborations. Several key commitments were made, including the promotion of safer roads by prioritizing clear vision for drivers and pedestrians, providing regular eye screenings for truck drivers and commercial vehicle operators, raising awareness on impaired vision as a major road safety hazard, and screening an additional 3 million commercial drivers and allied workers by 2030. This landmark initiative solidifies Sightsavers India's position in advancing vision-driven road safety, setting the stage for policy action, systemic change, and a safer future on Indian roads.

## Integration of glaucoma screening into state level blindness prevention programmes

Sightsavers facilitated four high-impact consultations across Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Karnataka, engaging Health Ministers, policymakers, and over 100 stakeholders from health, civil society, UN agencies, pharma, and media. State Health Ministers and key Government Health Authorities pledged policy action, recognizing glaucoma as the third leading cause of blindness. The governments of Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh have committed to integrating glaucoma screening and management into their blindness prevention programmes, starting with government

referral centres. This coordinated policy action and institutional engagement mark a major step toward preventing avoidable blindness and integrating comprehensive glaucoma care into India's public eye health system. A national level consultation is planned in 2025 in which all insights, suggestions and findings from the state consultation would be presented to the national stakeholders towards policy and institutional reforms around glaucoma management in the country.

## **Introduction of measures to make elections disability inclusive**

Following advocacy from Sightsavers and partner organisations, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has directed all states and union territories to make polling booths physically accessible for persons with disabilities. Together with Organisations for Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), Sightsavers provided technical assistance to develop inclusive guidelines, involving the provision of ramps, railings, and accessible entry and exit points at polling stations. Additionally, the ECI provides wheelchairs at polling stations to assist voters with mobility impairments. Persons with disabilities were given the right to vote via postal ballots in certain circumstances, such as being unable to visit polling stations due to mobility constraints. This initiative was further enhanced with provisions allowing persons with disabilities to cast their vote via absentee ballots, ensuring their participation without physical presence at a polling booth. In partnership with OPDs and disability organizations, the ECI has initiated awareness campaigns to inform persons with disabilities about their electoral rights, the voting process, and the importance of their participation in elections. These programmes include creating accessible voter literacy materials and running campaigns in multiple languages and accessible formats. These efforts were instrumental in the 2024 national elections, in enabling persons with disabilities to exercise their right to vote both at polling stations and from their homes, fostering true inclusivity in India's electoral process.

## **Development of a national guideline and implementation framework on equitable and inclusive education**

In 2024, Sightsavers supported the development of a national guideline and implementation framework on equitable and inclusive education (NGIFEIE), to inform the delivery of inclusive education initiatives to be taken at state, district and local level. The NGIFEIE operationalises the 2020 national education policy to ensure accessible, equitable, and inclusive education for marginalized groups, including children with disabilities. The guideline was launched by the Ministry of Education after a series of stakeholder consultation held at state and national level organised by Sightsavers India as part of its collaborative advocacy.

## **Establishment of a national level data forum**

As part of the initiative to develop a disability inclusive National Indicator Framework (NIF), a national level data forum has been constituted by the UN Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO) by involving civil society and OPD members, in which Sightsavers country office has been included. The Ministry of Statistics and Department of Disability Affairs have principally agreed to work on the NIF to address the disability specific indicators. The National Working Group of OPDs led by UNRCO are regularly engaging with these two ministries to push the disability disaggregated agenda within the NIF. OPDs in this process have been sensitised and capacitated around these disability specific indicators to influence

their constituencies and stakeholders. Essential disability inclusive indicators have been identified from the existing NIF and submitted to the ministry for approval.

## Pakistan

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### Marrakech Treaty comes into force

On 12 June 2024, the Marrakech Treaty came into force in Pakistan. This marks an important step forward for the rights of persons with disabilities, as the treaty facilitates access to published works for persons who are blind and visually impaired through providing a copyright exception, allowing the sharing of works to people with disabilities without the copyrights holder's permission. Sightsavers played a key role in reaching this achievement, through initiating the discussion for ratification of the Marrakech Treaty with key stakeholders, including the Intellectual Property Organisation (IPO), publishers' association, ministry of human rights, ministry of planning, development and special initiatives and OPDs. The treaty was ratified in December 2023, came into force in 2024, and the next step will be for Sightsavers to advocate for the implementation of the treaty.

### Inclusion of eye health medicines into the essential drug list

Following advocacy from Sightsavers and partner organisations, the essential drug list for the province of Punjab was revised to include eye health medicines in 2023. In 2024, Sightsavers supported the roll out of the revised drug list in the province of Sindh, with Rural Health Centres integrating eye health medicines into the essential drug list. In this way, Sightsavers is influencing the delivery of eye care services across multiple provinces in Pakistan.

### Incorporation of eye health indicators into the HMIS

Building on the advocacy achievements in 2023, Sightsavers continued to advocate for the incorporation of eye health indicators into the District Health Information System (DHIS2). Now that eye care services have been established at all rural health centres, Sightsavers initiated discussions with the district health authorities to activate the eye care indicator in the DHIS2. Beyond this, Sightsavers proposed new indicators to be introduced, to capture the delivery of refractive error, cataract and diabetic retinopathy services in the DHIS2.

### Launch of the first diploma level dispensing opticianry course

In collaboration with the National Committee for Eye Health and the College of Ophthalmology and Allied Vision Sciences (COAVS), Sightsavers developed a two-year opticianry course in 2023. The course was approved by the relevant regulatory body, in this case the Punjab Medical Faculty. Until now, there was no formal academic programme in opticianry, and this course is the first-ever diploma programme in Pakistan, which will produce a skilled workforce of opticians. The course was formally launched in 2024.



## **Publication of the first census report with disability disaggregated data**

A census was carried out in 2023, for the first time incorporating the Washington Group Questions on disability. This was a landmark achievement, following many years of advocacy on the part of Sightsavers and partner organisations. In 2024, the census report was published, providing disability disaggregated data at the national level, which government institutions are now able to use in the planning and allocation of resources and services to ensure sufficient provision for persons with disabilities. Sightsavers was able to analyse the data and application of the Washington Group Questions, to assess the roll out and provide recommendations on how the delivery of the census can be improved in future. As a result of Sightsavers advocacy and lobbying efforts, the Washington Group Questions are now part of the national data standardisation framework, and in 2024, for the very first time these questions were made part of the annual school census tools.

## **Roll out and scale up of inclusive education teacher training**

In 2023, Sightsavers' technical experts developed a foundation course for the Federal College of Education on inclusive education, for a four-year bachelor's degree teacher training programme, to introduce trainee teachers to the concepts of inclusive education for children with disabilities. In 2024, Sightsavers consulted with different universities and training institutes to develop a training on inclusive education for pre-service and in service teachers. This will be done in 2025 under a new project. Moreover, Sightsavers has initiated discussions with the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan to find opportunities for the scale-up of this course in all universities offering degree courses in education. To raise awareness, a one-day training on disability inclusion in higher education was conducted for the Higher Education Commission in 2024.

## **Launch of the International Common Assessment of Numeracy report**

In 2023, Sightsavers adapted the International Common Assessment of Numeracy (ICAN) tool for children with visual and hearing impairments, with the aim of making the assessment method accessible for the children with disabilities and thereby generating comparable data on learning outcomes for children with and without disabilities in Pakistan. In 2024, the ICAN report was launched, releasing the new assessment tool and taking education sector a step closer towards the roll out.