

# Managing Autism in ASEAN: Institutional Challenges and Preparedness

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Autism refers to a range of conditions characterised by some degree of impaired social behaviour, communication and language, and a narrow range of interests and activities that are both unique to the individual and carried out repetitively. Autism begin in childhood and tend to persist into adolescence and adulthood. In most cases, the conditions are apparent during the first 5 years of life (World Health Organisation, 2020). In crafting Resolution 62/139, members of the U.N. General Assembly acknowledged the Convention on the Rights of the Child (U.N. Human Rights, 1989) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (U.N. Enable, 2006), which guarantee rights and freedoms to; (i) live in dignity, (ii) live a full life in the community as other children do, and (iii) be self-reliant economically in adulthood. In line with the mission of the conventions, ASEAN Member States strive hard to realising it. Currently, ASEAN Member States have included persons with autism as disabled persons recognized by the law. However, only a few ASEAN Member States have developed specific national autism plans and strategies while some ASEAN members have adopted an ad-hoc measures in favour of persons with autism in sectoral laws, above all relating to education, health, and social care. ASEAN Member States is yet to prepared an early intervention programmes, health programmes, educational programmes, employment programmes and social service programmes. All these programmes are towards the sustainable life long journey of persons with autism. Meanwhile, the research has shown eight challenges faced by the ASEAN Member States, which includes (i) diagnosis and intervention for persons with autism, (ii) family, caregiver and guardian life support, (iii) education and vocational services, (iv) lack of awareness among the public, (v) employment of person with autism, (vi) facilities for person with autism, (vii) lack of appropriate data management and research and (viii) empowerment of resource. Hence, as the institution's roles, ASEAN Member States should (i) enhance health care capacity, (ii) provide inclusive education, (iii) create public awareness, (iv) develop community based rehabilitation (CBR) programmes, (v) support persons with autism at workplace, (vi) strengthen national capacities in caring for children, young people and adults with autism, (vii) strengthen research and data management, and (viii) establish a global partnership. Therefore, ASEAN Member States are required to develop an institutional framework to co-ordinate set of services across health, education and social sectors to cater to the needs of persons with autism appropriately.