

The right to express and receive information and ideas through all forms of communication: Are we making progress?

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Aims/Objectives: What was the purpose what you did? Why is your topic important? What did you want to change? What difference did you want to make?

In 2006 the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with a Disability (UNCRPD) was the first official declaration to recognise the communication rights of people who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). In 2020 the International Communication Rights Alliance (ICRA) was established. In this project ICRA aimed to determine with reference to UNCRPD Article 21. Freedom of Expression and Opinion, and Access to Information, the extent to which signatory countries to the UNCRPD report on communication rights and making information accessible for people who use alternative and augmentative communication.

Methods/Process: Who was involved? What did you do? (100 words)

This study was a qualitative study using document analysis (Bowen, 2009) from an online source. Two researchers analysed the concluding observations for article 21 for 43 countries that met the criteria for inclusion.

This study focused on the rights and concluding observations for Article 21, as it is the only article which refers to the rights of the individual to expression, and the right to seek information in a manner that is appropriate for them.

A content analysis identified topics that were common across the concluding observations.

Results: What did you find? What changed? What difference did you make? What did you learn?

Analysis revealed that the UN treaty monitoring body focused on five topics when providing concluding observations and recommendations. They referred to:

- i. Standards
- ii. Laws
- iii. Information in accessible formats
- iv. Access to software and technologies/communication technology
- v. Provision of resources and training

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) was mentioned in concluding observations for just 13 of the 43 countries reviewed (30.2%). The term appeared to be used broadly as an umbrella term. Augmentative and alternative communication was used to refer to any type, mode or means of communication across different modalities in relation to how this increased the accessibility of information,.

Conclusion: How could other people use what you found out? What would you recommend other people do based on what you did and what you found out?

There are two pillars of communication rights. Receive messages (accessible information), and expressing messages. There appears to be greater understanding regarding actions that can make information accessible. It is more difficult addressing rights of people to express themselves.

We propose a number of actions which we believe would clarify the recommendations made by the UN treaty monitoring body, and bring a greater focus to communication rights related to expression.

1. Provide clarification regarding the term alternative and augmentative communication
2. Consult with alternative and augmentative communication users when developing terminology
3. Specify ways the UN recognises the rights of people with disability

Alignment with the Conference Theme: How does your proposal address the conference theme of ‘New Frontiers’? How does your proposal showcase something new we can do to make the world a better place for people with disability? (50 words)

This paper addresses human rights and inclusive communities, and poses ways forward, new frontiers. The paper discusses communication rights which would facilitate civic participation for people who use AAC and enable greater participation in communities.

The UNCPRD committee could modify the focus of concluding statements and influence signatory countries