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Public policies for social inclusion in the face of disability in Ecuador from a systematic review

Políticas públicas de inclusión social ante la discapacidad en Ecuador desde una revisión sistemática

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Abstract

This study analyzed gaps in public policies for the social inclusion of persons with disabilities in Ecuador. The objective was to identify these policies within the current legal framework and evaluate their effectiveness. The methodology was based on a systematic review following the PRISMA protocol, with searches in academic databases such as Scopus, Dialnet, SciELO, Google Scholar, and institutional repositories, using Boolean operators. Inclusion criteria related to thematic relevance, academic or governmental origin, publication in the last five years, Spanish language, and full access to the document were applied. After the screening process, 21 articles were selected for in-depth analysis. The results showed progress in the areas of education (78.5% of students in regular education), social assistance (67% with social registration), and employment (62,298 people integrated into the workforce). However, challenges remain in terms of the effectiveness and coverage of inclusion policies.

Keywords: public policy, disability, inclusion.

Resumen

El presente estudio analizó las brechas de las políticas públicas de inclusión social para personas con discapacidad en Ecuador. El objetivo fue identificar dichas políticas dentro del marco legal vigente y evaluar su efectividad. La metodología se basó en una revisión sistemática siguiendo el protocolo PRISMA, con búsqueda en bases de datos académicas como Scopus, Dialnet, SciELO, Google Académico y repositorios institucionales, mediante el uso de operadores booleanos. Se aplicaron criterios de inclusión relacionados con la pertinencia temática, la procedencia académica o gubernamental, la publicación en los últimos cinco años, el idioma español y el acceso completo al documento. Tras el proceso de cribado, se seleccionaron 21 artículos para el análisis en profundidad. Los resultados evidenciaron avances en los ámbitos educativo (78.5% de estudiantes en educación regular), de asistencia social (67% con registro social) y laboral (62,298 personas insertadas). No obstante, persisten desafíos en cuanto a la efectividad y cobertura de las políticas de inclusión.

Palabras clave: políticas públicas, discapacidad, inclusión.

Introduction

From the perspective of inclusion for individuals with disabilities, this article analyzes public policies—an essential topic within the human rights and social development agenda of Ecuador. Over the years, the country has developed a legal framework based on the 2008 Constitution and the Organic Disability Law, explicitly aimed at ensuring equality of opportunity and parity of conditions for this priority attention group. However, despite these legislative advancements, structural issues continue to impede the effective implementation of these policies, limiting the full participation of individuals with disabilities in educational, labor, and social domains (Castro & Amancha, 2023; Ramos et al., 2021).

Disability is understood as the deficiency, restriction, or limitation that affects a person's structure or function and hinders the execution of actions or tasks (Ramos et al., 2021). In this context, Article 6 of the Organic Disability Law defines a person with a disability as someone whose biological, psychological, or associative capacity is permanently restricted due to sensory, physical, or mental deficiencies (Ley Orgánica de Discapacidades, 2012). Seven types of disabilities are recognized: physical, visual, auditory, speech, intellectual, psychosocial, and multiple (Manual de Calificación del Ministerio de Salud Pública, 2023). The National Health

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Authority is responsible for conducting the qualification process, which is free and based on criteria of irreversibility and maximum clinical improvement. Once accredited, individuals must obtain their identity card, which includes a certificate specifying the type and percentage of disability, as established by the Organic Law on Identity and Civil Data Management (Registro Civil–Ecuador, 2018).

Regarding the current situation, statistical data reported by the National Council for Equality of Disabilities (CONADIS, 2022) provide insight into the advancements and challenges faced by these policies.

Table 1

Individuals by type of disability

Type of disability	Number of Individuals	Percentage
Physical	215.156	45,66%
Intellectual	108.957	23,12%
Auditory	66.538	14,12%
Visual	54.397	11,54%
Psychosocial	29.157	5,55%
Total	**471.205**	**100,00%**

Note: Taken from the National Agenda for Equality of Disabilities 2021 – 2025 (p. 46), by CONADIS, 2022.

The analysis is grounded in a theoretical framework composed of various currents that allow for the interpretation of findings from multiple dimensions. Firstly, the Social Model of Disability Theory (Ferrante & Ramacciotti, 2021; Ramos et al., 2021) shifts the focus from individual deficiency to the social, architectural, and attitudinal barriers that restrict participation, enabling an assessment of policies based on their capacity to dismantle these barriers. This approach is complemented by Harold Lasswell's Public Policy Theory, which provides a procedural framework for analyzing the phases of formulation, implementation, and evaluation of policies directed at this group. Additionally, Amartya Sen's Capability Approach emphasizes the expansion of real freedoms that individuals possess to lead lives they value, thereby evaluating the impact of policies on their quality of life and autonomy (Díaz, 2022).

The context of this research is 21st-century Ecuador, a country that has undergone significant constitutional and legal transformations, recognizing its plurinational character and the rights of nature. In this framework, the rights of individuals with disabilities have been elevated to a category of priority guarantee. However, this progressive legal architecture contrasts with a social and economic context characterized by persistent inequalities, attitudinal barriers, and budgetary limitations that hinder the effective realization of these rights. Demographically, the population with disabilities exhibits a distribution where 45.66% corresponds to physical disabilities, followed by intellectual (23.12%) and auditory (14.12%) disabilities (CONADIS, 2022), highlighting the need for differentiated and specific policy design.

In light of this panorama, the research poses the following question: What are the main public policies regarding disability in relation to the social inclusion of this priority attention group in Ecuador? Correspondingly, the study aims to identify and analyze the current public policies that promote the social inclusion of individuals with disabilities, evaluating their scope, application, and effectiveness within the Ecuadorian legal framework to contribute to strengthening strategies that ensure the full exercise of their rights.

Methodology

The study was based on a systematic review of scientific literature, following the PRISMA protocol. The process was carried out in sequential phases, starting with the identification phase, in which an advanced search strategy was designed using Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) and truncation (*), aiming to obtain precise and relevant results.

The search formula employed was: ("public policies" OR "organic disability law") AND (disability OR "people with disabilities") AND ("social inclusion" OR "inclusive education" OR "labor insertion") AND Ecuador NOT "intellectual disability"*.

The sources consulted included recognized academic databases such as Scopus, Dialnet, SciELO, and Google Scholar, in addition to institutional repositories from Ecuadorian universities and government agencies, incorporating technical reports, legal regulations, and public policy documents.

In the screening and selection phase, the following criteria were applied:

Inclusion criteria:

- IC1: Publications focused on the study variables.
- IC2: Sources from recognized academic or governmental institutions.
- IC3: Publications issued in the last five years.
- IC4: Publications in Spanish.

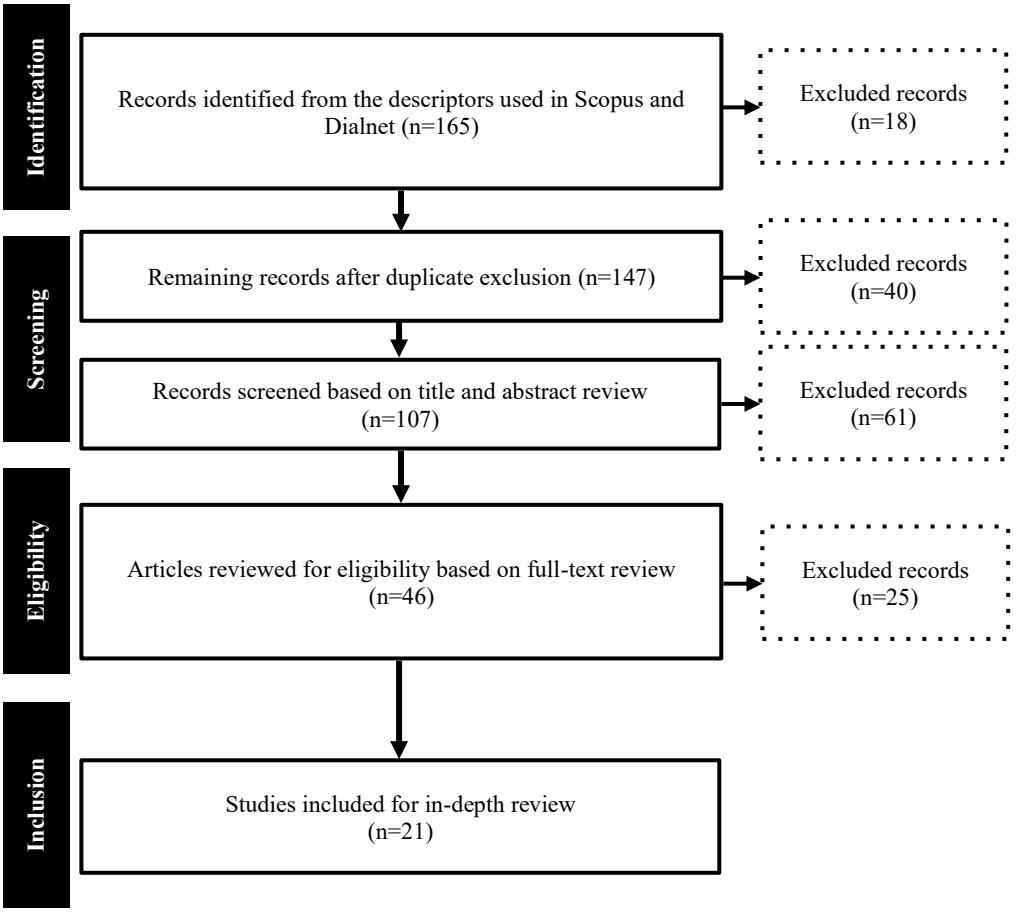
Exclusion criteria:

- EC1: Publications unrelated to the variables.
- EC2: Publications older than five years.
- EC3: Publications in languages other than Spanish.
- EC4: Publications without full access.

The following flow diagram illustrates the phases according to the PRISMA model applied during the document selection process:

Figure 1

Flowchart of the publication selection procedure according to the PRISMA model.



Note: Author's own elaboration.

Finally, as part of the PRISMA process, the stages of identification, screening, and eligibility led to the inclusion of 21 scientific articles related to public policies for the social inclusion of people with disabilities in Ecuador, which meet criteria of timeliness, thematic relevance, and methodological quality.

Results

Public policies on disability in Ecuador

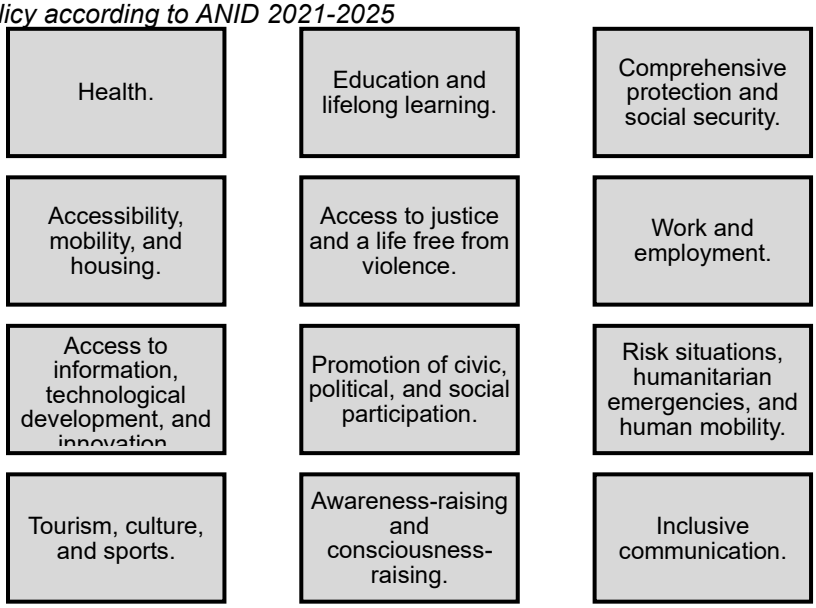
Public policies are government actions of public interest that originate from a diagnostic process and feasibility analysis, aimed at addressing the problems and needs of citizens (Ramos et al., 2021). The Ecuadorian constitutional framework establishes its foundations in Article 47, which guarantees policies for the prevention of disabilities and, in conjunction with society and families, seeks to ensure equal opportunities and social integration (Asamblea Nacional del Ecuador, 2008). This mandate has driven the creation of a robust set of regulations and technical tools that materialize these principles and guarantee the rights of individuals with disabilities (Sánchez et al., 2022; UNFPA-Ecuador & FLACSO Ecuador, 2023).

The Organic Disability Law serves as the legal cornerstone of this framework. Its objective is to ensure the prevention, timely detection, habilitation, and rehabilitation of disabilities, guaranteeing the full validity, dissemination, and exercise of the rights established in the Constitution, as well as in international treaties and instruments (Asamblea Nacional del Ecuador, 2012).

Authors such as Castro and Amancha (2023) and Lasso and Folleco (2022) argue that the formulation of public policies in the social sphere is a key governmental proposal to remedy the historical exclusion of this group. The institutional framework is supported by Article 156 of the Constitution, which assigns the National Councils for Equality, including CONADIS, the formulation, mainstreaming, observance, monitoring, and evaluation of public policies in this area (Asamblea Nacional del Ecuador, 2008). This framework is operationalized through planning instruments such as the National Agenda for Disability Equality (ANID) 2021-2025 (CONADIS, 2022), whose public policy axes are presented in the following figure:

Figure 2

Axes of public policy according to ANID 2021-2025



Note: Taken from ANID 2021-2025, by CONADIS, 2023.

Advances in public policy for social inclusion

To examine the contributions of public policies to the quality of life of individuals with disabilities, three main dimensions were analyzed: education, social assistance, and employment.

a. Education

Inclusive education reflects a shift in social perception regarding how to address the needs of students with special educational requirements (González & Sarango, 2024). This principle is supported by the Organic Law of Intercultural Education (LOEI), which in Article 47 mandates the State to implement mechanisms that strengthen emotional, cognitive, and psychomotor development, ensuring inclusion in regular educational institutions (Ministerio de Educación, 2015).

The implementation of this mandate is supported by tools such as the Guide to Pedagogical Strategies from the Ministry of Education (2013), which establishes that adapting the classroom environment benefits not only students with special educational needs but also the entire educational community, fostering cooperation and peer support (Fernández & Fernández, 2022; Arcos et al., 2023).

Table 2

Students with disabilities by type of education

Population	Number of Individuals	Percentage
Special Education	9.144	19,21%
Regular Education	37.367	78,50%
Permanent Popular Education	1.092	2,29%
Total	**47.603**	**100,00%**

Note: Taken from Disability Statistics, by CONADIS and MINEDUC, 2021.

Official data reflect these efforts: of a total of 47,603 students with disabilities, 78.50% are enrolled in regular education institutions, 19.21% in special education, and 2.29% in permanent popular education.

b. Social assistance

The Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES) is responsible for formulating policies that strengthen the comprehensive inclusion of individuals with disabilities and their families, considering criteria of poverty, vulnerability, and extreme poverty (UNFPA-Ecuador & FLACSO Ecuador, 2023; Arteaga Ureta et al., 2021).

One of its most significant interventions is the non-contributory cash transfers, which, according to the Social Registry, are provided through bonuses and pensions to ensure minimum welfare conditions (MIES, 2020; Zambrano et al., 2022). These economic benefits allow access to essential services such as health, food, medications, rehabilitation, and transportation, and even serve as guarantees for human development credits aimed at entrepreneurship (Analuisa et al., 2020).

The coverage of these programs is evidenced by data from the Social Registry: of a total of 471,205 individuals with disabilities, 67% (314,027) are registered, while 33% (157,178) remain outside this system (CONADIS, 2022).

Table 3

Individuals with disabilities registered in the social registry

Population	Number of Individuals	Percentage
With Social Registry	314.027	67%
Without Social Registry	157.178	33%
Total	**471.205**	**100%**

Note: Taken from the National Agenda for Disability Equality 2021 – 2025 (p. 46), by CONADIS, 2022.

Among the direct beneficiaries of the transfers are 158,892 individuals receiving various types of bonuses and pensions. The "Toda Una Vida" Pension has the highest coverage (49.97%), followed by the "Joaquín Gallegos Lara" Bonus (25.89%), specifically aimed at individuals with severe disabilities (CONADIS & MIES, 2023).

Table 4

Users with disabilities receiving bonuses and pensions

Population	Number of Individuals	Percentage
"Toda Una Vida" Pension	79.405	49,97%
"Joaquín Gallegos Lara" Bonus	41.135	25,89%
"Mis Mejores Años" Pension	31.272	19,68%
Human Development Bonus	3.514	2,21%
Pension for Persons with Disabilities	1.894	1,19%
Variable Component Human Development Bonus	809	0,51%

Pension for Older Adults	767	0,48%
"1000 Days" Bonus	96	0,06%
Total	**158.892**	**100%**

Note: Taken from Disability Statistics, by CONADIS and MIES, 2023.

c. Employment

Labor insertion is an essential component for improving the living conditions of individuals with disabilities and their families, as it promotes productive work and contributes to the country's development (Moreno & Caisachana, 2021). The right to work is protected by constitutional policies, laws, and regulations that guarantee labor inclusion, although limitations related to employer awareness in public and private companies persist (Zambrano et al., 2022).

The Organic Disability Law, in Article 46, establishes that CONADIS, along with the national labor authority, is responsible for formulating policies for inclusion and labor stability (Asamblea Nacional del Ecuador, 2012). Among its most relevant instruments is the 4% employment quota, as stipulated in Article 47 of the LOD, which mandates public and private companies with at least 25 employees to hire individuals with disabilities (CONADIS, 2022). Additionally, Article 51 guarantees reinforced labor stability, providing compensation for unjustified dismissal equivalent to eighteen months of the highest salary (Asamblea Nacional del Ecuador, 2012).

Literature highlights that hiring individuals with disabilities should be viewed as a strategic advantage, as it strengthens corporate image through diverse talent and is based on the capabilities and skills of employees (Analuisa et al., 2020).

In terms of statistical data, there are 62,298 individuals with disabilities actively employed, distributed as 65% men and 35% women (CONADIS, 2022). The following table details labor insertion by gender at the national level:

Table 5

Individuals with disabilities actively employed by gender

Gender	Number of Individuals	Percentage
Female	21.556	35%
Male	40.742	65%
Total	**62.298**	**100%**

Note: Taken from the National Agenda for Disability Equality 2021 – 2025 (p. 46), by CONADIS, 2022.

Discussion

The analysis of the selected articles reveals that most authors agree that Ecuador has made significant strides in the social inclusion of individuals with disabilities. These advancements are reflected in the Constitution of the Republic, the Organic Disability Law and its regulations, the National Agenda for Disability Equality (ANID), as well as in various ministerial agreements, guides, and manuals that inform policies in areas such as education, employment, and social protection. However, there is a recognized need to strengthen planning, resource allocation, and evaluation mechanisms for programs and projects to ensure their effectiveness in improving the quality of life for this priority attention group.

In the educational field, the Organic Law of Intercultural Education (LOEI) mandates the adaptation of pedagogical mechanisms to meet the needs of students with disabilities, whether in regular or specialized education. Additionally, it promotes teacher training through awareness-raising sessions and work guides, as well as the implementation of communication and evaluation strategies that offer multiple alternatives for demonstrating learning. Authors emphasize the necessity of restructuring inclusion strategies to fit contemporary educational processes, actively involving teachers, students, and families in building inclusive classrooms that favor the holistic development of individuals with disabilities.

In terms of social protection, the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES) plays a central role through programs grounded in the Constitution, the Organic Disability Law, and ministerial agreements. Key actions include non-contributory cash transfers, physical, sensory, and psychological rehabilitation, as well as the promotion of adapted cultural, sports, and recreational activities. These programs are executed in coordination

with other state institutions and civil society, generating socio-economic benefits that facilitate access to health, education, and welfare services. Nonetheless, the growing population of individuals with disabilities in Ecuador underscores the need to expand program coverage to ensure more equitable and sustained access.

Regarding the labor sector, actions are based on the Organic Disability Law alongside regulations such as the Organic Law of Public Service, the Labor Code, and the Organic Law of Public Enterprises. These laws promote mandatory labor inclusion in public and private companies with more than 25 employees, reinforced labor stability, job accommodation, continuous training programs, and labor inspections. Despite these advancements, challenges persist in the practical application of these measures, necessitating the design of more effective strategies to enhance the employability and job retention of individuals with disabilities.

In this respect, authors suggest that labor insertion should be embraced by the business sector not only as a legal obligation but also as part of their corporate social responsibility. This entails recognizing the skills and competencies of individuals with disabilities, promoting inclusive spaces through awareness talks, adapting infrastructures, and ensuring the effective compliance with the hiring quota stipulated in current regulations.

Conclusions

The review conducted on public policies for social inclusion of individuals with disabilities in Ecuador demonstrates significant progress toward building a more inclusive society. National legislation has promoted the recognition of rights through laws, ordinances, and regulations that strengthen public policy at various levels of government.

However, challenges remain that limit the full participation of individuals with disabilities, including technological, demographic, economic, cultural, labor, and architectural factors, which require programs and projects grounded in principles of sustainable development.

In education, laws and guides have been formulated to facilitate the implementation of inclusive teaching-learning strategies, as well as evaluations adapted to the type of disability. These actions are supported by the District Units for Inclusion Support from the Ministry of Education, which provide technical assistance.

In social assistance, the State has implemented programs such as home care, integrated care centers, and cash transfers, executed through the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion in coordination with decentralized autonomous governments and private organizations.

In the labor sector, regulations such as the Organic Disability Law, the Labor Code, and the Organic Law of Public Service have promoted inclusion through the mandatory hiring of 4% in companies with more than 25 employees, in addition to guaranteeing job stability, compensation for unjustified dismissal, and other protections. The Ministry of Labor monitors compliance through periodic inspections.

In summary, the results allow us to conclude that Ecuador has shown normative and management advances in education, social protection, and employment, although it still faces gaps in coverage and effectiveness. This situation necessitates strengthening public policies and directing new academic research to identify specific needs and optimize services intended for this priority attention group.

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