

Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Statement to the High Level Political Forum

A disability-inclusive and sustainable recovery to COVID-19

15.3.2021

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to exacerbate pre-existing inequalities and expose the structural discrimination and exclusion experienced by persons with disabilities worldwide. While the pandemic threatens the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals for all, persons with disabilities are disproportionately impacted due to pre-existing attitudinal, environmental, and institutional barriers.

The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (the Committee) expresses its grave concern about reports of multiple, ongoing human rights violations due to the pandemic. Persons with disabilities experience greater risk of discrimination in accessing healthcare and life-saving procedures due to ableism, including triage protocols that prevent access to treatment based on disability or level of support requirements, quality of life assessments, and other disability-based prejudice.

In many cases, States' responses to COVID-19 have been neither accessible nor inclusive of persons with disabilities. Barriers in accessing health services and information are intensified, including obstacles to the access of medicines, vaccines, rehabilitation, and assistive devices due to the increased pressure on healthcare systems. Persons with disabilities experiencing domestic violence encounter inaccessible reporting mechanisms and inaccessible shelters. Persons with disabilities are also particularly disadvantaged by the socio-economic consequences of COVID-19, including the impact on education, employment, social protection, and the disruption of support systems.

Persons with disabilities were left out of the pandemic response and recovery efforts, which demonstrates that the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) has not been effectively implemented.

The Committee highlights the importance of the human rights principles and standards that must underpin the sustainable and resilient response and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic for all. To this end, the Committee calls upon States to adopt a human rights-based approach and implement the CRPD as the guiding framework to build an inclusive path to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, highlighting the following recommendations:

- 1. Closely consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities and their representative organisations in applying a human rights-based response that is inclusive of, and responsive to, persons with disabilities.** Persons with disabilities in all their diversity must be placed at the centre of all stages of COVID-19 response and recovery, including planning, implementation, monitoring prevention and containment measures, and distribution of vaccinations.

2. **Ensure mainstreaming of disability, in conjunction with specific measures, and measure progress toward disability inclusion.** Mainstreaming of disability and specific measures are required to guarantee the effective inclusion of persons with disabilities into all COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. It is also critical to collect disaggregated data to measure progress towards disability inclusion, which is essential for sustainable development.
3. **Ensure accessible, affordable, and inclusive health care for persons with disabilities.** States are required to address physical, attitudinal, and financial barriers to facilitate the access of persons with disabilities to health care. States must ensure non-discrimination in the allocation of scarce medical resources, accessible facilities, public health information, and services.
4. **End institutionalization and accelerate the transition to community-based solutions in compliance with Article 19 of the Convention.** The Committee expresses its grave concern at the overwhelming numbers of deaths of persons with disabilities in residential care homes and psychiatric facilities, and the isolation, abuse, and neglect experienced in institutions.
5. **Address the gender impacts of this pandemic, including gender-based violence.** Women and girls with disabilities are at higher risk of experiencing violence. Many women are being forced to ‘lockdown’ at home with their abusers at the same time that support services are disrupted. This will require States to ensure accessible victim assistance services, including safe spaces where women can report abuse without alerting perpetrators, online and telephone support services, and accessible shelters.
6. **Implement measures to minimize the negative effects of the crisis on children with disabilities.** The containment measures of the pandemic come with a heightened risk of children witnessing or suffering violence and abuse. Children with disabilities are least likely to benefit from distance learning solutions, with higher probabilities of dropping out of school.
7. **Ensure accessibility of facilities, information, and communications.** Without accessible information, buildings, and communications, persons with disabilities cannot access public services on an equal basis with others. All public advice campaigns, information, and communications must be available in accessible means, modes, and formats.
8. **Prioritize persons with disabilities in the socio-economic response and implement inclusive social protection systems.** Social protection is essential for persons with disabilities to cover the extra costs related to disability, which may increase due to the crisis. Comprehensive disability registries, universal disability allowance, and equal access to other social protection programmes, including poverty reduction programmes, and emergency relief, are critical for a swift recovery.

- 9. Ensure that persons with disabilities and support networks of their choice have priority access to COVID-19 vaccination.** States must ensure that persons with disabilities provide their free and informed consent to receive vaccines. Vaccination sites and all vaccination information must be inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.

To build equitable, inclusive and resilient communities, a human rights-based approach to disability is crucial for progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and ensuring that no one is left behind.
