
Online consultation with civil society

Survey response 1

Information details

Country and Name of the organization:

USA, CBM Global Disability Inclusion on behalf of the Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities
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Questions

1. In your experience, has the COVID pandemic resulted in additional barriers and challenges for civil society participaiton in national and local decision-making? (Maximum limit: approximately 5,000 characters with spaces)

The Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities' 2020 research study at the national level found crosscutting barriers in participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations at the national and local levels. These include the following.

- Remote working and social distancing caused new challenges for many organizations of persons with disabilities to carry out needed advocacy efforts and participation in society. There were barriers in terms of interacting with their own membership, key decision makers, and political representatives in national and local governments.
- Barriers due to increased digital divide was prevalent. Many respondents highlighted how they faced barriers in accessing digital technology in a number of ways: (1) in terms of accessibility of devices to persons with disabilities with different accessibility requirements, (2) lack of access to fast internet connections to download the most up to-date information, and (3) financial means to be able to purchase data packages to access regularly updated information on COVID-19.
- There were barriers in accessing social protection. Respondents shared challenges with how social protection systems were not able to respond to crisis situations and how persons with disabilities in receipt of social protection, found themselves unable to access any additional funding that came as a result of the crisis.
- Lack of COVID-19 data on persons with disabilities and thus not being able to address existing barriers.
- Lack of information on how persons with disabilities are included and if they are prioritized in vaccination programmes.

2. Are you aware of specific efforts aimed at including civil society, including those working in the health sector and medical research, in designing strategies to respond to the pandemic (for example, in the context of vaccination campaigns etc.)? (Maximum limit: approximately 5,000 characters with spaces)

N/A

3. How have emergency or other measures imposed by the Government in the context of COVID-19 affected your work and the work of other civil society groups (for example, to access information, express critical views and feedback, mobilize others)? Have you or other civil society actors been involved in reviewing the effectivity and continued relevance of emergency measures? (Maximum limit: approximately 5,000 characters with spaces)

The International Disability Alliance and the International Disability and Development Consortium have proposed policy and practical solutions on how the rebuilding of an inclusive future for all can be delivered.

Key points:

How countries respond to COVID-19 will shape how we recover. Right now, various parts of our world are at different stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is vital that all plans for both response and recovery leave no one behind and rebuild an inclusive future for all.

Rebuilding an inclusive future for all based on the delivery of the SDGs to ensure persons with disabilities are not left behind needs to be the core component of COVID-19 recovery.

COVID-19 has exacerbated existing inequalities. We can build back better and create a more inclusive world if we take proper action. We should make sure response and recovery efforts are truly inclusive, accessible and seeking consultation with and the participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, so we can become stronger and more resilient.

As countries continue the management of COVID-19 as a public health issue, while also transitioning to open up economies and societies, removal of existing barriers and building back inclusively are critical for future implementation of the SDGs. Let's use the SDGs to build back more resilient, sustainable, greener and kinder societies than existed in pre-COVID times.

Recommendations for governments, INGOs, foundations, CSOs, private sector and individuals include to:

- Ensure that both COVID-19 response and recovery are disability inclusive and based on the rights of persons with disabilities;
- Ensure close consultation with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations at all levels in designing and implementing as well as monitoring response and recovery roadmaps; and
- Accelerate the delivery of the SDGs and use this opportunity to build back more resilient, sustainable, greener and kinder societies than existed before, and to rebuild our society in a way that truly leaves no one behind.

4. In the COVID context, has the Government adopted measures to ensure safe and inclusive online participation of civil society? Have these reached groups that were previously under-represented? Can you provide examples of specific challenges and promising practices? (Maximum limit: approximately 5,000 characters with spaces)

The Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities' research from 2020 and 2021 found specific challenges in that persons with disabilities around the world have been adversely affected by the pandemic with additional or new barriers, including barriers in the recovery phase.

The most common barriers highlighted include:

- Lack of accessible COVID-19 information for all persons with disabilities;
- Barriers in receiving and accessing social protection measures and employment (formal and informal, losing employment first, and accessibility barriers in the virtual working environment);
- Lack of disability inclusion in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts at all governmental levels, creating significant disconnections between national and local actions;
- Lack of access to healthcare facilities;
- Lack of available COVID-19 data disaggregated by disability;
- Remote working and social distancing caused new challenges for many organizations of persons with disabilities; and
- The increased digital divide among persons with disabilities.

The shifting role of organizations of persons with disabilities is an example of a good practice. To address lack of information and other gaps in government services, organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) stepped in and played a role to address these gaps. Many OPDs shared vital information otherwise inaccessible, raised awareness with their members, and provided accessible materials in different formats. Moreover, in many countries, governments began to provide national sign language interpretation and live captioning for news briefings, which continues today. Often, the inclusion of these services was a direct result of advocacy efforts led by deaf communities and OPDs, and sometimes with support from international organizations. While OPDs should not replace the role of government services, they can work in partnership with governments to reach members, share information, and achieve effective outcomes.

5. Have additional restrictions to access to funding and resources been imposed during or as a result of COVID-19? (Maximum limit: approximately 5,000 characters with spaces)

N/A

6. Are you aware of cases of intimidation, both online and offline, against civil society for voicing opinions or questioning decisions by authorities? How did State institutions respond? (Maximum limit: approximately 5,000 characters with spaces)

N/A

7. Looking forward, what are the key recommendations to authorities with a view to preserving and expanding civil society space in the context of COVID-19 and beyond? Please be as specific as possible. (Maximum limit: approximately 5,000 characters with spaces)

Key recommendations include to:

- Authorities should closely consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of COVID-19 response;
- Ensure that international NGOs, bilateral donors, and UN agencies include representative organizations of persons with disabilities in government planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of COVID-19 response;
- Review and revise social protection policies to better protect persons with disabilities in future crises;
- Develop an effective strategy that facilitates access to the vaccination for persons with disabilities, especially in rural areas;
- Share COVID-19 information in accessible formats for all persons with disabilities, and use all appropriate channels to disseminate the information to reach the widest audience;
- Collect and share accurate national disability data to achieve disability inclusion in government COVID-19 response; and
- Strengthen inclusive education systems to ensure that learners with disabilities are supported and in virtual learning environments.
- Include the most marginalized groups including persons with disabilities in government programs and policies, including in emergency plans;
- Provide a disability COVID-19 liaison in all official government COVID-19 websites; and
- Support more research to identify barriers to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts, especially in the Global South.