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Nobody Left Behind – People with Disabilities, Functioning and Disability during the Coronavirus Epidemic¹

Unless governments and communities take action, discrimination against people with disabilities could increase during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic disclosed an epidemic of stigma, discrimination, and prejudice against vulnerable people in particular children, people with disabilities and ageing people. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 1 billion people are living with disabilities world-wide. The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to disproportionately affect these individuals, rising barriers of different types and at different levels and thus putting them at higher risk of morbidity and mortality.

- Barriers to implementing basic hygiene measures, such as hand-washing (e.g. hand basins or sinks may be physically inaccessible, or a person may have physical difficulty rubbing their hands together thoroughly);
- Difficulty in enacting social distancing because of additional support needs or because they are institutionalized;
- The need to touch things to obtain information from the environment or for physical support;
- Barriers to accessing public health information.

Depending on underlying health conditions, people with disabilities may also be at greater risk of developing more severe cases of COVID-19 if they become infected.

This may be because of COVID-19 might exacerbate existing health conditions, particularly those related to respiratory function, immune system function, heart disease or diabetes; and barriers to accessing health care.

People with disabilities may also be disproportionately impacted by the outbreak because of serious disruptions to the services they rely on.

The barriers experienced by people with disabilities can be reduced if key stakeholders take appropriate actions.

People with disabilities face barriers in all areas of life.

- Education

¹ Protecting Life Against COVID-19, Rehabilitation International, May 2020, <http://www.ri-global.org/covid-19-disability-resources/>

- Employment
- Social & political life
- Community participation
- Health

Disabling barriers: widespread evidence

- Inadequate policies and standards
- Negative attitudes/discrimination
- Lack of provision of services
- Problems with service delivery
- Inadequate funding
- Lack of accessibility
- Lack of consultation and involvement
- Lack of data and evidence

Barriers have negative consequences in several life areas

- Lower educational achievements
- Lower levels of employment
- Higher rates of poverty
- Poorer health outcomes

People with disabilities have to be able to participate in society “on an equal basis with others”.

All the barriers increase disability and during the COVID-19 epidemics in all affected countries the barriers faced as well as the needs of persons with disabilities increased. The guiding framework for responding to the needs of people with disability should be the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disability (UNCRPD). It condemns discrimination and all forms of barriers that prevent accessibility to care and inclusion of all people and many countries ratified the UNCRPD with the engagement to have it implemented and applied. Countries are therefore requested to identify barriers, and take action to eliminate them, as well as to identify needs, and take actions to meet them, so that the participation level of people with disabilities is comparable to the participation level of the general population of a country.



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