

Forum: Special Conference on Post-Pandemic World

Issue: Developing a framework to support disabled individuals during pandemics

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INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that over 1 billion people, or 15 percent of the world's population are affected by some sort of disability¹. Nonetheless, our world is designed in a non-disabled mold whose standards and requirements people with disabilities are unable to meet. It is an environment which cannot completely fulfill all their necessary accommodations, therefore initiating difficulties and problems for them and their adaptation in society. They are one of the most marginalized and discriminated communities, usually overlooked and being excluded even from discussions about their rights and demands.

The discrimination has its roots in the earlier medical model, which suggested that the 'problem' of disability lies with the disabled individual rather than with society. This was later corrected with the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled People² and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities³ which establish that disabled individuals have equal rights with non-disabled people and shall not be viewed as objects.

Several studies suggest that COVID-19 may pose a greater risk to people with disabilities. People with disabilities do require special accommodations which were not met during the COVID-19 pandemic. Another factor that worsened the situation for people with disabilities is that they are a high-risk group considering they may already have medical and health issues.

¹ "Reaffirming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities." Old Dominion University, www.odu.edu/content/dam/odu/offices/mun/docs/3rd-disabilities.pdf.

² OHCHR. "Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons." OHCHR, 9 Dec. 1975, www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-rights-disabled-persons.

³ "Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities." UN | United Nations, 13 Dec. 2006, www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/resources/general-assembly/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-ares61106.html.

In conclusion, persons with disabilities face numerous difficulties during their everyday life which worsened due to the pandemic and lockdown. It is therefore crucial for Member States to include and support disabled individuals through hard times like these.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Disability

A disability is defined as a condition or function judged to be significantly impaired relative to the usual standard of an individual or group. The term is used to refer to individual functioning, including physical impairment, sensory impairment, cognitive impairment, intellectual impairment, mental illness, and various types of chronic disease.⁴

Impairment

Impairment is an absence of or significant difference in a person's body structure or function or mental functioning. Impairment can be classified into two categories: structural impairments and functional impairments. Structural impairments include problems with an internal or external body part. Functional impairments signify the condition in which a component of the body has completely or partially lost its function.

Braille System

The Braille System is a system of raised-dot writing devised by Louis Braille (1809-1852) for the blind in which each letter is represented as a raised pattern that can be read by touching with the fingers.⁵

Healthcare System

A health system consists of all organizations, people and actions whose primary intent is to promote, restore or maintain health. This includes efforts to influence determinants of health as well as more direct health-improving activities. A health system is, therefore, more than the pyramid of publicly owned facilities that deliver personal health services. In recent years, the definition of "purpose" has been further extended to include the prevention of household poverty due to illness. Health systems are known as open systems because they are open to influence from external factors such as poverty, education, infrastructure, and

⁴ Disabled World. "Disabilities: Definition, Types and Models of Disability." *Disabled World*, 7 Apr. 2022, www.disabled-world.com/disability/types.

⁵ "Medical Definition of Braille System." *MedicineNet*, 2021, www.medicinenet.com/braille_system/definition.htm.

the broader social and political environment. A health system's many parts operate at many levels to provide coherence at community or national level.⁶

International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)

The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, also known as ICF, is a classification of the health components of functioning and disability. The World Health Assembly on May 22nd, 2001 approved the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health and its abbreviation of "ICF" as the successor of the ICIDH, the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps.

Ableism

Ableism is the discrimination against disabled people with the mentality that people with disabilities are incomplete, diminished, or damaged. The people with such beliefs are characterized as ableist.

Social Stigma

Stigma defines a set of negative and often unfair beliefs that a society or group of people have about something⁷. Social Stigma is a label that associates a person to a set of unwanted characteristics that form a stereotype.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Types of disabilities

Mobility and Physical Impairments

Mobility and Physical Impairments is a category of disabilities which can be varying in types including upper limb(s) disability, lower limb(s) disability, manual dexterity, such as not being able to execute controlled movements using hand-eye coordination, or a disability in coordination with different organs of the body, where the brain cannot control a specific body part. Disabled individuals who fall under this type of impairments can be born with it, acquire it due to age problems or be an effect of a disease.

People with physical impairment often are required to use assistive devices or mobility aids such as crutches, canes, wheelchairs and artificial limbs to obtain mobility.

⁶ "Health Systems." *International Federation of Medical Students' Associations*, ifmsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/IFMSA_Program_Health-Systems.pdf.

⁷ "Stigma." *Britannica Dictionary*, www.britannica.com/dictionary/stigma.

Statistically speaking, the percentages for the people who call necessary a wheelchair to accommodate them in their everyday life and tasks reaches up to 1% of the population in 34 MEDCs, approximately 10.000.000, and where as in 156 LEDCs 121.800.000 people or 2% of persons require a wheelchair. In contrast, it is estimated that about 110.000.000 people worldwide are in need of a wheelchair but don't have one.

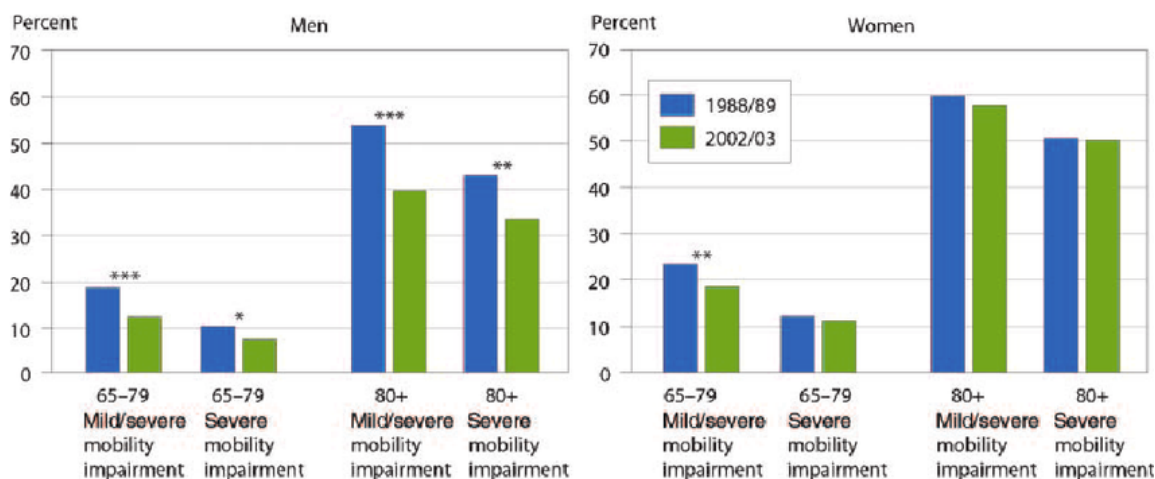


Figure 1: A survey of self-reported mild or severe mobility impairment between men and women in the ages of 65–79 and 80 and older, for 1988–89 and 2002–03.⁸

Spinal Cord Disability

Spinal Cord Disability is an impairment which in some cases can be a birth defect, but mostly is the aftermath of a spinal cord injury (SCI). This type of injury mostly occurs due to severe accidents which can be caused by vehicle accidents, acts of violence or dangerous activities and can be either complete or incomplete. An incomplete injury means that the messages conveyed by the spinal cord to the rest of the body are not completely lost, whereas the entirety of the sensory organs are dis-functional as a result of a complete injury.

However, it is possible in some cases that the incomplete SCI is curable where the patient has to go under several surgeries to reverse damage to the spinal cord. Following up the surgery, the patient has to be admitted to an intensive care unit (ICU) where he is monitored in order to achieve the best possible outcome. Over time a significant improvement is shown and the individual can control some body parts again, but a full recovery is unlikely in most cases. On the other hand, people sustaining a complete SCI are highly unable to achieve improvement and regain control of the areas where the nerves have been damaged.

Vision Disability

⁸ “Self-Reported Mild or Severe Mobility Impairment and Severe Mobility Impairment.” *Research Gate*, www.researchgate.net/figure/Self-reported-mild-or-severe-mobility-impairment-and-severe-mobility-impairment_fig3_7020215.

Vision Disability or Vision Impairment is a type of disability where a person's eyesight can not be classified as normal. Visual impairment can be caused by some diseases, trauma, or degenerative conditions and a visually disabled person is described as "partially sighted", "low vision", "legally blind" and "totally blind" depending on what type and level of vision problems they have. Some common vision disabilities include scratched cornea, scratches on the sclera, diabetes related eye conditions, glaucoma, cataracts or color blindness. Oftentimes vision impairments are not classified as disabilities due to the fact that the majority of visually disabled individuals do not suffer from a serious eye disease or blindness, but from more common types like myopia (nearsightedness).

Studies from the World Health Organization show that 80% of all visual impairment can be prevented or cured when detected and dealt with in early stages. However it is quite common (90%) that the visually impaired live in low-income settings thus making it hard for them to seek treatment. Lastly, it is estimated that 285 million people are visually impaired worldwide with 39 million being blind and 246 having low vision.

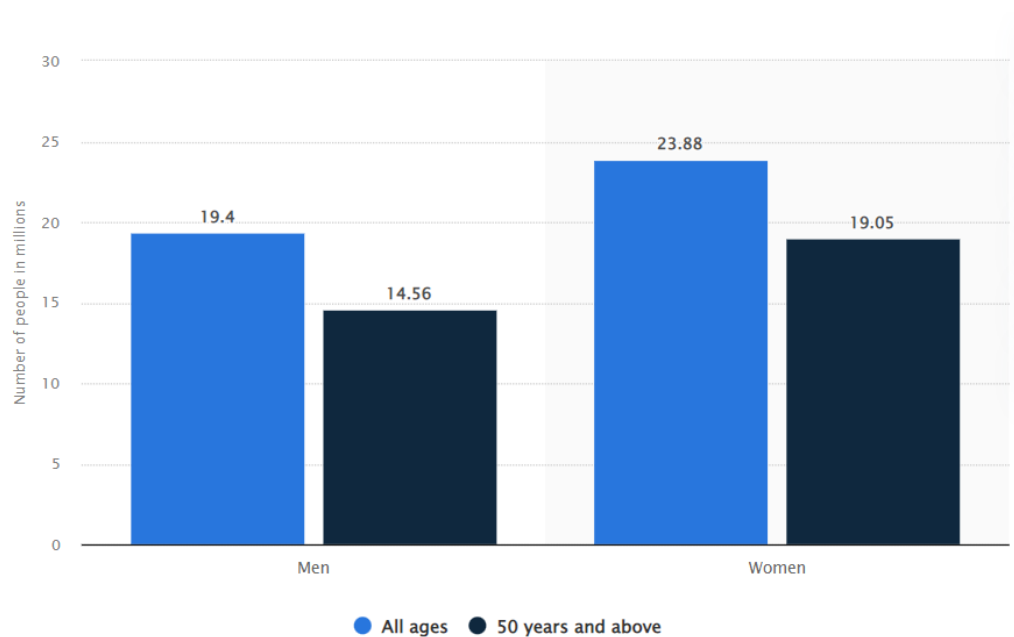


Figure 2: Number of people with blindness worldwide in 2020, by age and gender (in millions)⁹

Hearing Disability

Hearing Impairment describes a person who is completely or partially deaf meaning having difficulties in hearing conversational speech or any sound. Hearing loss can be mild, moderate, severe, or profound and in one or both ears. This type of disability can be evident

⁹ Statista. "Number of Blind People Worldwide in 2020." *Statista*, 21 May 2021, www.statista.com/statistics/1237876/number-blindness-by-age-gender.

at birth or caused later in life from several biologic diseases like meningitis which can damage the auditory nerve or the cochlea.

Partial Deafness can be benefited through the use of hearing aids or cochlear implants to improve someone's hearing abilities and other assistive devices and services, like captioning. Most Deaf people have profound hearing loss, which implies very little or no hearing which is assisted through the use of sign language for communication.

Intellectual or Learning Disabilities

Intellectual disability (used to be Cognitive Disability) is a term used when a person has certain limitations in mental functioning and in skills such as communicating, taking care of themselves-, and social skills.¹⁰ Cognitive Disabilities are impairments that cannot be contacted during somebody's life; people can only be birthed with them. Under this category fall disabilities such as Down Syndrome, Dyslexia and Autism, where the infant had abnormal genetic conditions, trouble at birth, or problematic pregnancy.

Since intellectual disabilities are not as prominent as other types of disabilities the parents of the children born with these conditions can identify some specific sign in their behavior or speech such as having trouble understanding social rules, or learning how to talk, difficulties speaking and walking. Still some children do not get diagnosed until they attend school or sometimes even as adults.

Psychological Disorders

Psychological Disorders known as Mental Illnesses are a specific type of disability where the person affected by them may have a disturbed behavioral, emotional, and cognitional state which could affect a person's work, school, and social relationships as well. Common such disorders include Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Bipolar Disorder, Depression and Eating Disorders, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Schizophrenia.

Mental Disorders can be sometimes identified and diagnosed either through a psychiatrist's diagnosis or through psychiatric manuals which explain signs and symptoms of psychological disorders. It is common though that a mental disorder is not diagnosed. But even if there is a diagnosis, it is often linked to being stigmatized for the "illness". However, an identification is necessary in order for a person to seek treatment and rehabilitation. Such treatment can be achieved with various methods such as psychotherapy (psychologists, psychiatrists, group therapy), medication, lifestyle changes and support from others.

¹⁰ "Cognitive Disability Resources." *Cognitive Disability Resources*, www.oecd.org/CognitiveDisabilityResources.aspx.

Invisible Disabilities

Invisible Disabilities or Hidden Disabilities is an umbrella term for all the disabilities that are not immediately apparent to others. Most of the disabilities can fall under this category since they could be psychological, e.g. an anxiety disorder, visual or hearing impairment where the person wears contacts or a cochlear depending on the severity of the impairment, intellectual or any kind of pain or syndrome that cannot be spotted with a quick look at someone.

Difficulties in life as a person with a disability

According to the World Health Organization disability is not a minority issue, in fact people with disabilities make up 15% of the population, around 1 billion people¹¹. Nonetheless it is prominent that the way the society is built does not support them in any shape or form, but it makes it even more troublesome for them to function and act “normal”. This type of difficulty can be detected in several aspects of everyday life, from their access in a store to the way they are treated in public spaces.

Education

Education is a basic right for all humans and must be available and accessible to everyone. Majority of children with disabilities face numerous difficulties in school and thus are deprived of basic education. Persons with visual or hearing impairments must attend special schools who can accommodate their needs, like communicating with sign language, reading with the Braille System, or kids with intellectual disabilities who cannot immediately comprehend the lesson tend to prefer homeschooling.

With the evolution of technology, education is improving for those with disabilities and is getting more accessible, but it can be unaffordable for families with lower income.

Accessibility

People with disabilities face several obstacles in every step they take. Especially the physically disabled people who acquire a wheelchair or crutches to move around. Moreover, the comfort of people with disabilities is rarely taken into consideration when public spaces are designed. There are no ramps, no elevators big enough to fit into, or hallways are too narrow to move in.

¹¹ “10 Facts on Disability.” *WHO | World Health Organization Health Organization*, 1 Dec. 2020, www.who.int/news-room/facts-in-pictures/detail/disabilities.

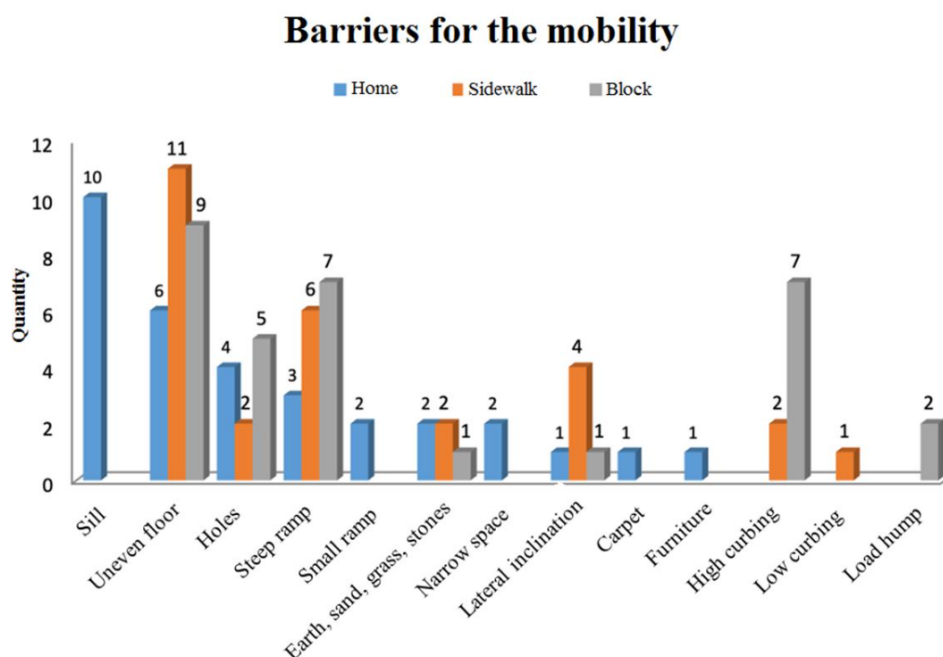


Figure 3: The most observed barriers by quantity for the people using wheelchairs¹²

Access to Healthcare

Impairments and Disabilities are linked with the physical and mental state of the person. People with disabilities contain thus a higher risk of showing health problems that decrease their overall health and quality of life. These individuals are reported to have poorer overall health, which can worsen if they adopt unhealthy habits, such as smoking or being physically inactive, if they do not have a mobility impairment. It is proven as well that people with disabilities have less access to adequate health care which is one of the factors that the community faces plenty of problems during the coronavirus pandemic. Where the healthcare system is not free for every citizen or does not cover medical expenses for disability treatments, disabled individuals with low income are not able to afford the essential care. Moreover, persons with disabilities like intellectual impairment or with trouble communicating are prone to be mistreated by the health workers.

Lack of Employment

Employment is an economic activity through which a person works in order to support themselves financially. Someone is going to get a job based upon his education and skills, but in the case of people with disabilities they may lack basic education and cannot accomplish everyday tasks, they are bound to fall behind other candidates for that job. Additionally, another factor which indicates most of disabled people are unfit for the working environment is their impairments because someone who cannot stand or walk without

¹² Caro, Camila Caminha. "The Functional Mobility with Wheelchairs in Individuals with Spinal Cord Injury." *SciELO Brazil*, 19 Oct. 2020, www.scielo.br/j/cadbto/a/NKXv7MpfLrVJHXsDzGLc9Kk/?lang=en#.

assistance will not fulfill the standards for many jobs. In anticipation, many governments around the world have introduced schemes which will guarantee jobs for disabled people.

Relationships

Humans are social beings which are expected to form relationships with other people. When it comes to individuals with a disability it is either hard for them to form this kind of bond with others or they are discriminated against and made fun of.

The Social Stigma of disabilities

In most countries, people with disabilities are stigmatized, discriminated against and marginalized. Disabled people often find themselves at the receiving end of violent and disgusting actions justified as deserved because they fall out of the norm. Cultural or religious beliefs can underpin stigma, for example the belief that disability is the result of the sins of previous generations or God's will to punish people.

An influential reason for the stigma behind impairments are the harmful stereotypes that are created and passed on throughout the years and still exist in the present day. A common assumption is that people with disabilities can only do basic, unskilled jobs which could not be further from false. They usually have a clear understanding of their abilities and skills, thus applying for jobs whose requirements they can and will meet. Another stereotype describes disabled individuals as people who should be pitied or praised for managing to live in this condition. People with Disabilities are normal people who happen to have been born or developed some sort of impairment and do not need other people to remind them of their own condition. A disability is not a flaw, not an abnormality, not a sickness and not something that necessarily needs fixing. Disabilities are often seen as a target for people who find satisfaction in putting others down by teasing or abusing them mentally or physically. Ableist behaviors are unfortunately common in our society due to the normalized discrimination, which is not punished or confronted.

In conclusion, unless stigma is adequately considered and addressed when developing policies, then people with disabilities will no longer be marginalized and subjects to negative personal, social and economic comments.

People with disabilities during COVID-19

The spread of COVID - 19 is a rather challenging aspect for everybody's life, but it is even more striking for people with disabilities who have to deal with challenging issues as well due to their disabilities.

For people with visual impairments who are used to dealing with their environment through touch, cannot touch anything anymore due to health regulations to minimize contamination. Oftentimes, they cannot rely on the help of others because many may act paranoid and scared from the possibility of getting infected by the virus, if they offer guidance to a blind person.

Deaf or hard of hearing people struggle with communication between others when everybody is wearing masks. Then they are not able to read lips or decipher other’s notions. If sign language is not used some hearing-impaired people cannot communicate or the possibility of someone lowering their mask for the impaired person to lipread puts both individuals in higher infection danger.

People with an intellectual disability struggle to comprehend why adopting and implementing important public health and health protecting routines can help them stay safe. Even for the youth with intellectual disabilities it can be hard to attend online classes which can lead to lack of education.

A physical disability means that disabled individuals with wheelchairs must use a longer path or must deal with narrower halls which is both tiring and frustrating. They may not follow physical distancing regulations because they require personal assistance or guidance to conduct their daily activities in public.

Another problem with having a disability during the pandemic is the constant fear of being denied access to healthcare services such as ventilators and lifesaving treatments due to medical rationing or discrimination. Additionally, people with disability can be at greater risk of developing severe symptoms because of pre-existing health conditions underlying the disability.

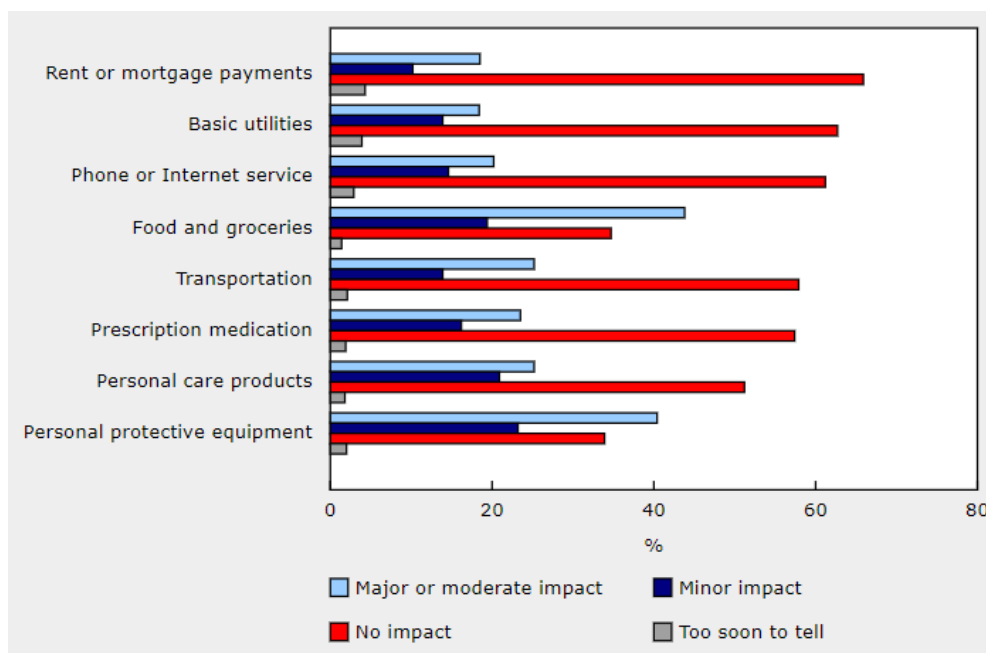


Figure 3: Impact of COVID-19 on financial obligations or essential needs, crowdsourcing participants with long-term conditions or disabilities, aged 15 to 64¹³

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

China

After the start of covid-19, China as the motherland of the virus had to apply the World Health Organization's guidelines and policy. Since the outbreak was fatal for the country's population, specific measures had to be taken which did not completely protect people with higher health risks; disabled people. It was later pointed out at the United Nation Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) meeting by Zhang Haidi, chairman of the China Disabled Persons' Federation, that people with disabilities are more severely affected by COVID-19 than others and the barriers and inequalities they face have further increased. The government was able to quickly formulate some already existing laws regarding the safety of people with disabilities. China managed to support the disabled community, thus enhancing their strength and influence in topics such as politics, education and employment.

United States of America (USA)

The USA adopted a new law in 1990, The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA is a civil rights law that forbids discrimination against persons with disabilities in all areas of public life. It guarantees the same rights and opportunities for individuals with disabilities as everyone else and their equal opportunity in public accommodations, employment, transportation, services, etc. In 2009 President Barack Obama successfully signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) on behalf of the United States, but in 2012 the U.S. Senate was called upon to ratify the CRPD which was not granted.

European Disability Forum (EDF)

The European Disability Forum is a non-governmental organization which advocates for the inclusion of persons with disabilities within the European Union (EU) policy. The Forum protects over 100 million persons with disabilities in Europe and tries to achieve equal opportunities for all people with disabilities. Their work includes developing policies on accessibility, equality, migration and acceptance for the people with disabilities.

European Union (EU)

The European Union adopted the EU disability policy for persons with disabilities in December of 2020, that fights for the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in society, for

¹³ "Impact of COVID-19 on Financial Obligations of People with Long-Term Conditions or Disabilities." *Statistics Canada*, 27 Aug. 2020, www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200827/cg-c002-eng.htm.

equal treatment as non-disabled people and prohibiting acts such as of discrimination, marginalization and racism. The EU's disability policy framework serves to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), to which the EU and its Member States are party of. The Framework contains necessary topics about the rights of disabled EU citizens such as by implementing the employment equality act, tackles their issues in access by promoting the European Accessibility Act.

National Organization on Disability (NDO)

The National Organization on Disability was founded in 1982 and it is one of the first organizations to represent every person with a disability, regardless of particular needs or accommodations. Their main goal focuses on increasing employment opportunities for people with disabilities who are not employed either due to their special needs or due to the discrimination they face. In addition, they try to achieve the total acceptance and enrollment of persons with disabilities all around the world.

World Health Organization (WHO)

On January 30th, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the outbreak of Covid-19 a Public Health Emergency of International Concern and on March 11th a pandemic, due to the speed and scale of transmission. WHO considers that people with disabilities are highly impacted from the virus and have significantly higher chances of contracting Covid-19. Therefore, the World Health Organization developed "Disability considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak"¹⁴ in order to point out additional actions needed to be taken to ensure that people with disability minimize their chances of getting sick during the pandemic, as well as measures that people, governments, healthcare systems, disability organizations and the communities can take as a consideration of disabled individuals' well-being.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENTS
December 9th, 1975	The Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Person was adopted by the General Assembly as a framework to protect the rights of disabled individuals.
1982	The National Organization on Disability is founded it is one of the first organizations to represent every person with a

¹⁴ WHO, World Health Organization. "Disability Considerations during the COVID-19 Outbreak." *WHO | World Health Organization*, 26 Mar. 2020, www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Disability-2020-1.

	disability, regardless of particular needs or accommodations whose main goal is to provide employment for people with disabilities.
1990	The USA adopts The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a civil rights law that forbids discrimination against persons with disabilities in all areas of public life.
May 22nd, 2001	The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) was approved by WHO and is the classification of the health components of functioning and disability.
December 13th, 2006	The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is adopted and is an upgraded and much more supportive version of the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Person.
2009	President Barack Obama successfully signs the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) on behalf of the United States.
2012	The USA Senate does not ratify the CRPD.
January 30th, 2020	The World Health Organization declares the outbreak of covid-19 a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.
March 11th, 2020	The World Health Organization (WHO) declares the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak a global pandemic.
April 1st, 2020	The Joint Statement on Persons with Disabilities and COVID - 19 was adopted by the Chair of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in order to secure and protect the rights of disabled individuals during the coronavirus pandemic.
April, 2020	The World Health Organization publishes the report named "Disability considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak" to ensure that actions to protect disabled individuals during pandemics are taken.
December 2020	The EU adopts the EU policy for persons with disabilities which aims for the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in society, for equal treatment and prohibiting acts of discriminatory behaviours.

March, 2021	The European Commission introduced the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 to ensure the total inclusion of people with disabilities in society and serves as a compass for employment and social policies in Europe
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RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons ¹⁵

The Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Person was adopted on December 9th, 1975, by the General Assembly and forms a framework for the purposes of international and domestic law. It states that all persons with disabilities have the same rights as other persons and makes thirteen distinct proclamations. In the declaration are included the definition of “disabled person” and the application of the individual’s rights regardless of “race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, national or social origin, state of wealth, birth” in sectors like politics and economy, in the medical field, and others.

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) ¹⁶

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (A/RES/61/106) was adopted on December 13th, 2006. In contrast to the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Person, the Convention approaches persons with disabilities differently. People with Disabilities are not viewed as objects, but as human beings who are in the position to claim their rights and independently make decisions for their lives.

Joint Statement: Persons with Disabilities and COVID-19 ¹⁷

The Joint Statement on Persons with Disabilities and COVID - 19 was created on April 1st, 2020 by the Chair of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, on behalf of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility in order to secure and protect the rights of disabled individuals during the coronavirus pandemic. The statement conserves their access to health services and ensures that the Member States provide them with the same extence, quality and standard of healthcare as non-disabled people. In addition, it secures their rights on basic supplies during quarantine and isolation.

¹⁵ OHCHR. “Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons.” *OHCHR*, 9 Dec. 1975, www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-rights-disabled-persons.

¹⁶ “Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.” *UN | United Nations*, 13 Dec. 2006, www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/resources/general-assembly/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-wit-h-disabilities-ares61106.html.

¹⁷ “Joint Statement: Persons with Disabilities and COVID - 19.” *UN | United Nations*, www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2020/04/Joint_Statement_Persons_with_Disabilities_COVID19.pdf.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

In the past, there have been some attempts made to develop a framework to support disabled individuals during pandemics. The most important ones will be analyzed below.

Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021 - 2030¹⁸

In March 2021, the European Commission introduced the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021 - 2030 to ensure their total inclusion in society and re-enforces the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which established equality and non-discriminative behaviors as the foundation of EU policies. The new strategy has its cornerstones on the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 and serves as a compass for employment and social policies in Europe. The strategy promotes its implementation by the Member States of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The 2021-2030 strategy presents its main measures in three categories: the disabled individuals' rights as EU citizens, their independence and their equality with others. Firstly, every person in the EU has the same rights either with or without any impairment. Such rights acknowledge their right to move to another Member States or to participate in politics. Secondly, people with disabilities can entertain their right to live independently with whom and where. Additionally, in order to support them while living independently, the EU Commission tries to develop a framework to improve social services. Lastly, the strategy aims prohibits any type of discrimination or racism against persons with disabilities as well as any acts of violence. To achieve equal opportunities is another one of the strategy's goals and to have access to justice, education, culture, sport and tourism, as well as to all health services and employment.

End-Discrimination Campaign - COVID19¹⁹

The International Disability Alliance (IDA) and the International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC) launched the "End-Discrimination Campaign - COVID19" to raise awareness on the discrimination that persons with disabilities experience in accessing services and to indicate to the global community the urgent need to deliver disability inclusive COVID-19 responses at global, national and local levels.

The issue regarding disabled individuals during Covid-19 lies on the fact they are being disproportionately affected as well as differently treated from the medical staff. Oftentimes, when people with disabilities are at a critical state, they cannot make their own decisions

¹⁸ "Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021 - 2023." *European Commission - European Commission*, ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_810.

¹⁹ "End-Discrimination Campaign - COVID19." *International Disability Alliance*, www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/discrimination-covid19.

and most worryingly their lives are not considered as worth saving compared to others. Thus, the End-Discrimination Campaign - COVID19 aims for raising awareness and ending unequal treatment in their everyday life.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity.²⁰ Part of this plan is the protection of persons with disabilities as members of the community and their inclusion in the improvement of the society. In order to support those individuals, the SDGs alongside with the CRPD collaborate to ensure the achievement of these goals.

Goal 3 - Good Health and Well-Being²¹

The 3rd SDG focuses on the insurance of healthy lives and well-being for all persons with disabilities as well the content of the Article 15 of the CRPD where the disabled individuals have equal access to free or affordable health services. It is included as well that discriminatory barriers that prevent full access to health-care services must be removed. To achieve this equality in the medical care it is advised for the governments to strengthen their national legislation and policies on health care and make healthcare affordable for all.

Goal 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth²²

Goal 8 aims to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for the people with disabilities. These people are likely unable to get a job due the stereotypes revolving around their impairment or due to special accommodations which are not met in their working environment. However, the CRPD protects their rights to equal opportunities for employment as well as profiting off of it.

Goal 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities²³

²⁰ “Sustainable Development Goals | United Nations Development Programme.” *UNDP*, www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals.

²¹ “Ensuring Healthy Lives and Well-Being for All Persons with Disabilities.” *UN | United Nations*, www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2021/12/SDG-03-Health_WellBeing_infographic_final_20190906.pdf.

²² “Promoting Full and Productive Employment and Decent Work for Persons with Disabilities.” *UN | United Nations*, www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2021/12/SDG-08-Employment_infographic_20191127.pdf.

²³ “Making Cities and Communities Inclusive and Sustainable for Persons with Disabilities.” *UN | United Nations*, www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2021/12/SDG-11-Cities_infographic_20191127.pdf.

The 11th Goal is about making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe and sustainable for disabled individuals, because they have the rights of social protection and an adequate standard of living. In order to apply those rights, it is important that communities raise awareness on disability and create an environment where persons with disabilities are included without discrimination and can participate equally in them.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Alongside the previously mentioned attempts to support disabled individuals during pandemics, Member States are also urged to come up with more solutions and ways to include and protect those people. Prohibiting acts of ableism and racism as well as establishing organizations or administrative bodies responsible for improvement on the healthcare system and medical services should be considered and analyzed in depth.

School Education

It is a well-known fact that the education system certainly needs improvement in the sector of accessibility and inclusivity when it comes to students with disabilities. Not only is disability portrayed as an illness which needs to be fixed, but it is not discussed enough leading to misconceptions and ableist behaviors. Therefore, schools should include lessons about impairments and people with them as well as about sign language and the Braille System in order to help disabled adolescents. Due to the coronavirus pandemic where the classes were online the virtual lessons should include subtitles of the people with hearing difficulties and be recorded for the students with intellectual disabilities who may have a hard time comprehending the subjects.

Considerate Laws and Regulations on Persons with Disabilities

Most important measures for the protection and support of disabled individuals must be established from the governments of each Member State through regulations and laws. Persons with disabilities are proven to be on top of the groups with higher fatality rates from Covid-19, but still they are not kept in mind when the legislations are made.

Thus, Member States should establish disability-friendly regulations and protection measures when it comes to disabilities. Regarding vaccinations, people with disabilities should be considered a vulnerable group and be on priority list to minimize the chances of any detrimental cases. Preventions of Covid-19 like wearing masks or mandatory handwashing should be more flexible on disabled people, because they may have troubles following them. People with sensory issues could suffer from panic attacks when wearing masks or face difficulties breathing. In addition, retail shops have to be accessible for all people and wide hallways and ramps to accommodate people in wheelchairs should be obligatory. Further, these shops should provide services for any basic necessities to persons with disabilities

when they cannot physically go to the markets. Further, in the medical field services like check-ups or medication subscription shall be granted for persons with disabilities and not be ignored or postponed due to the importance of their health. Hospitals should include more beds in the emergency rooms for disabled people to provide them health services faster and have more effective outcomes.

Additionally, Member States should establish organizations or administrative bodies responsible for the support of disabled individuals and to ensure that their rights during pandemics. These organizations should be funded by each nation and whose regulations should be implemented by everyone.

Last but not least, supporting persons with disabilities is not only a governmental issue, but a social one where every able-bodied person should put in the effort to help the disabled community. Advocating for their rights, providing helpful services and protesting for their rights alongside donating money or volunteering to organizations which help the impaired people should be encouraged.

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