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# Will the SDGs Still be Relevant after the Pandemic? A Disability Rights Perspective



## STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- The SDGs need to be re-focused into feasible and inclusive life-saving actions that can be and are carried out for people everywhere.
- The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent policies are affecting persons with disabilities in grave ways, including greater risk of contracting COVID-19, increased barriers in accessing healthcare services, disruptions in needed services, and lack of access to public information and healthcare communication messages.
- The SDGs can survive if they address the critical situation faced by many communities globally, including persons with disabilities, just as the Goals emerged from stories at the grassroots level around the globe.



<http://sdg.iisd.org/commentary/guest-articles/will-the-sdgs-still-be-relevant-after-the-pandemic/>



**Talking points<sup>1</sup> for the open virtual IAEG-SDG Meeting: *Covid-19 impacts and responses on data collection, SDG monitoring and on vulnerable groups***

June 2, 2020

Presenter: Dr. Elizabeth Lockwood, CBM Global and Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities

**Covid-19 impacts and responses on data collection and SDG monitoring for persons with disabilities**

We are learning from the COVID-19 pandemic that the hardest hit are the most vulnerable and marginalized, including older persons, those with underlying health conditions, and persons with disabilities.

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent policies are affecting persons with disabilities in grave ways. This includes greater risk of contracting COVID-19, increased barriers in accessing healthcare services, disruptions in needed services, and lack of access to public information and healthcare communication messages.

Persons with disabilities may be at greater risk of contracting COVID-19 for various reasons. While simply having a disability does not put someone at higher risk, many persons with disabilities do have specific disabilities or chronic conditions that make COVID-19 more dangerous for them.<sup>2</sup> COVID-19 can exacerbate existing health conditions for some persons with disabilities, particularly those related to respiratory function, immune system function, heart disease or diabetes.<sup>3</sup>

Women with disabilities can be particularly at risk as they are up to 10 times more likely to experience sexual violence than women without disabilities and this violence can be exacerbated during mandated lockdowns, shelter-in-place orders, and other periods of isolation. Additionally, most shelters and other programs are inaccessible to women with disabilities.<sup>4</sup>

Even though this aforementioned information is well known, it is very difficult to find disaggregated data on it.

To address this gap, the Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities asked our members to share official COVID-19 data sources that disaggregate by disability to support evidence-based advocacy. In terms of quantitative data, we found that other than data on social protection measures due to COVID-19, no country (that we are aware of) is disaggregating COVID-19 data by disability. Which we consider a significant gap and subsequently risks leaving persons with disabilities out of COVID-related policies going forward.

We also carried out a qualitative research study to gather information on the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on persons with disabilities around the world. We held interviews with more than 25 people with disabilities in six languages, including in International Sign. We also conducted four regional focus group discussions. Participants were from all regions, representing more than 60 countries and all types of disabilities. The interviews focused on nine thematic COVID-19 related topics, one of which was on data.

We asked participants to share any resources on national-level data on COVID-19 and persons with disabilities. Overwhelmingly, participants had access to government data sources on the daily number of infected cases, deaths and recoveries. They also had sources of data disaggregated by gender, age, pre-existing health conditions, location, but not disability. Overall, participants indicated that governments are not disaggregating by disability, or if they are, are not sharing the data.

Many barriers are emerging from the findings, such as lack of ability to move around via transport, lack of access to COVID-related information from the government, and inability to effectively communicate with a mask (for deaf and hard of hearing people).

We are currently finalizing this study and will release a report with comprehensive findings in mid-June and are happy to share this with you. In addition, I recommend looking at the International Disability Alliance's key recommendations for a [disability-inclusive response](#) to the COVID-19 crisis.

In closing, we know that the post-pandemic world is becoming our new way of life. For the disability community we are findings increased discrimination and inequalities. To combat this, let's use the SDGs and the global indicator framework as guiding tools to fully and equally include the most marginalized groups to build back better, safer, resilient, and more inclusive communities worldwide.

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<sup>1</sup> Part of this presentation comes from the article by Lockwood, E. & Bartha, O. (2020). Will the SDGs Still be Relevant after the Pandemic? A Disability Rights Perspective. Retrieved from <http://sdg.iisd.org/commentary/quest-articles/will-the-sdgs-still-be-relevant-after-the-pandemic/>

<sup>2</sup> Pulrang, A. (March 30, 2020). *The Coronavirus Pandemic Is Settling Some Old Arguments About Ableism*. Retrieved from:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewpulrang/#21b9d9ca4e25>

<sup>3</sup> World Health Organization. (March 26, 2020). *Disability considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak*. Retrieved from: <https://www.who.int/who-documents-detail/disability-considerations-during-the-covid-19-outbreak>

<sup>4</sup> Ortoleva, S. & Holoboff, A. (February 27, 2020). Women Enabled International. Retrieved from:

<https://womenenabled.org/blog/unleashing-the-power-of-women-with-disabilities/> and <https://twitter.com/WomenEnabled/status/1247190281658793984?s=20>