



**United Nations**

Department of  
Economic and  
Social Affairs

## Concept Note and Programme

### **Global Forum on the COVID-19 crisis and persons with disabilities: Building back better towards an inclusive, accessible and sustainable world for all**

**Co-organized** by Permanent Missions of Ecuador, Hungary, Liberia, Singapore and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)

**Date:** 3 August Monday (10:00-11:30 am, New York Time)

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#### **Background:**

The COVID-19 outbreak has led to an unprecedented global crisis that has impacted the life and work of the general population in nearly all parts of the world. Persons with disabilities have been affected disproportionately by the pandemic, and also by many other compounded factors. The disruption of essential and support services, and pre-existing health conditions in some cases have left persons with disabilities at a higher risk of developing serious health problems. Furthermore, persons with disabilities have often been excluded from effectively receiving information and mainstream health provision, and they have been affected by limited access to goods and services. The COVID-19 crisis has exposed these underlying inequalities and exacerbate risk situations.

For persons with disabilities, everyday barriers such as physical accessibility, difficulties to implementing basic hygiene measures, affordability of healthcare, limitations on health insurance, and discriminatory laws and stigma, can be life threatening in the midst of a pandemic. Organizations of persons with disabilities and coalitions of health, emergency management, and

other experts have been making urgent calls in this regard. Member States, in partnership with community stakeholders, have been taking actions for COVID-19 crisis response and recovery, aimed at ensuring equal rights of persons with disabilities in line with the CRPD and the 2030 Agenda, and addressing their specific needs to maintain their health, safety, dignity, and independence in the community.

Furthermore, with the closure of educational institutes, young persons with disabilities have been particularly hit hard. Online education has made it more challenging due to inaccessible digital content and interfaces. Due to physical distancing measures, assistance in daily activities has decreased, leading to confinement to their homes, isolation and loneliness, which in turn affects mental wellbeing of these young people.

### **Objectives and thematic focus of the Global Forum: Building back better toward an inclusive, accessible and sustainable world for all**

The United Nations has also taken action to support Member States in their endeavor for COVID-19 response and recovery. On 6 May 2020, the Secretary-General of the United Nations issued a Policy Brief on a disability-inclusive COVID-19 response. The Policy Brief's recommendations, which were widely supported by 146 State Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, provide an action-oriented guidance not only for immediate COVID-19 responses, but also medium and long-term recovery and resilience-building, especially in the following areas:

- (1) Mainstreaming of disability in all COVID-19 response and recovery together with targeted actions to ensure systematic inclusion of persons with disabilities.
- (2) Accessibility of information, facilities, services and programmes in the COVID-19 response and recovery, which is fundamental to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the immediate health and socio-economic response to COVID-19.
- (3) Meaningful consultation with and active participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in all stages of the COVID-19 response and recovery.
- (4) Establishment of accountability mechanisms to ensure disability inclusion in the COVID-19 response.

In this context, this Global Forum is co-organized, under the auspicious of Ecuador, Hungary, Liberia and Singapore and with the support from UNDESA, to address some pertinent issues. Keynote speakers will discuss how the pandemic has highlighted the vulnerability of persons with disabilities and impacted their life. Panelists will share good practices and experiences in the four overarching areas of action specified above, focusing on actions to “build back better” societies emerging from the pandemic that shall be stronger and more inclusive, accessible and sustainable for all persons with disabilities.

Panelists have been invited to consider and prepare their discussions around the following questions:

- i. What have been the key challenges and gaps facing Governments in ensuring that persons living with disabilities are included and protected in the pandemic response?
- ii. What practices proved to be more disability-inclusive, through mainstreaming disability and/or disability-specific measures, throughout the pandemic responses of containment, mitigation and recovery?
- iii. What innovative measures, including those using accessible technologies, have been introduced at local, national or global level by Governments and non-State actors during and after the pandemic to include persons with disabilities?
- iv. In what ways have persons with disabilities and their organizations been consulted and engaged as actors and contributive partners to relevant COVID-19 strategies and actions at national and local levels?
- v. What are your key messages for Governments, the United Nations and the international community, for COVID-19 responses and recoveries that aim at “building back better”, implementing the CRPD, and achieving the SDGs for persons with disabilities?

**Format:** Using WebEx, an internet- based platform, this multi-stakeholder Forum, will be attended by representatives and experts from Governments, United Nations system, organizations of persons with disabilities, academic institutions and the private sectors. The Forum will consist of keynote presentations and panel discussion in a Davos format.

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**Language:** English will be used for the Forum discussion. International sign-language interpretation will also be available.

**Technical arrangements and accessibility:** To the extent that is technical feasible within the WebEx online platform, arrangement will be made for accessibility to enable full participation by all speakers and participants with disabilities at the Forum, including through a real-time caption in English (through Facebook Live) and sign-language interpretation. In addition, the event will be also recorded and made available online on the UNDESA website.

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## Programme

### 1. Opening

Moderated by: UNDESA

Opening statement/s:

- H.E Luis Gallegos, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility of Ecuador

### 2. Davos-style panel discussion

- Welcome & introduction: Ms. Daniela Bas, Director of DESA/DISD (5 minutes)
- Panel presentations (5 minutes for each speaker)
  - Ms. Maria Soledad Cisternas, Secretary-General’s Special Envoy on Disability and Accessibility.

- H.E. Ambassador Katalin Annamária Bogyay of Hungary
- H.E. Ambassador Dee-Maxwell Saah Kemayah, Sr of Liberia
- Ms. Phyllis Choo, Director of Planning at SG Enable, Singapore
- Ms. Maria Gomes Do Valle Ribeiro, UN Resident Coordinator in Zimbabwe
- Ms. Charlotte McClain-Nhlapo, Global Disability Advisor, World Bank Group.
- Mr. Vladimir Cuk, Executive Director of IDA.
- Ms. Marcie Roth, Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer of World Disability Institute
- Mr. Axel Leblois, President and Executive Director of G3ICT.
- Mr. Kartik Sawhney, Co-Founder at I-Stem, AI scientist at Microsoft, and UN SDG Young Leader 2018.

- Q&A (20 minutes)

### **3. Closing**

- H.E. Ambassador Helena Yáñez Loza , Ecuador
- UNDESA