

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

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COVID-19 has highlighted the gaps in public policies, legislation and services in relation to persons with disabilities, but at the same time I would like to emphasize the following achievements.

1. From the beginning persons with disabilities, through their representative organizations, joined their voices strongly to be heard at local, regional and global levels on relevant issues. The first concern was the Right to life. Persons with disabilities living with Covid-19 have the right to access intensive care units, including mechanical respirators and other life-saving supports, on an equal basis with others. Every person's life has equal value. The correct application of triage does not admit selection or discrimination on the basis of disability.
2. The strengthening of the inclusive and participatory response to the pandemic has meant the creation of cross-sector working groups, with the participation of civil society, to address issues like health care, mental health care, situations of violence and abuse, the exercise of rights of persons with disabilities (for instance education and work), accessibility, during the quarantine, among others. These working groups have produced guidelines and regulations for civil servants, health workers, and police, among others.
3. On the other side, many local governments have demonstrated their decisive role to channel a participatory and inclusive response, interacting with central governments in order to satisfy the needs and rights of the population, including the views of persons with disabilities with a human rights approach.

Which are the challenges for the Decade?

1. The inclusive and participatory response is a way of working that has been definitively installed, not only in relation to the pandemic but also in other matters of public interest. Therefore, this kind of response with full participation of persons with disabilities through their representative organizations should be recognized in legislation and public policies, with binding effects.

2. Universal accessibility is a pillar and bridge for the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and also for the fulfillment of the SDGs. To implement universal accessibility means to move broadly towards the eradication of multidimensional poverty (SDG 17), and a key factor to revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.
3. Currently we are talking about smart cities with technological innovations. These cities will be really smart when they are fully accessible, allowing the exercise of all human rights by all persons with disabilities. A great challenge is that the use of technology, which has shown advantages, for example in forms of telework, or in the communication of persons with disabilities around the world, cannot be a barrier in the educational field for persons with disabilities.
4. It will be very important to establish inclusive governance through multilateral political decision-making to reinforce the alliance among central governments, local governments, DPOs, private sector and other stakeholders to catalyze universal accessibility in order to exercise human rights, implement the CRPD, fulfill the SDGs, especially overcoming poverty, always taking into account the reality of each local context and the needs and proposals of its inhabitants.
5. It is indispensable the creation of “global big data” to address the critical issue of accessibility during and after the pandemic, which will be a legacy for humanity, to better face other humanitarian emergencies in the future, helping Member States to identify the connection among accessibility, human rights and SDGs (at least directly with 10 SDGs).