



Joint Statement

Local governments and persons with disabilities in relation to Covid-19

May 05, 2020

1.- With the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities accessibility became a human rights principle, adopting a specific norm that obliges States Parties to take pertinent measures to ensure access to persons with disabilities, on equal terms with others, to the physical environment, transport, information and communications, including information and communication systems and technologies, and other services and facilities open to the public or for public use, both in urban and rural areas, so that persons with disabilities can live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life.

2.- Universal accessibility is undoubtedly the most mainstreamed legal structure in human rights for the 21st century¹. It is based on "universal design"², which is

¹12 COSP, Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary General on Disability and Accessibility, United Nations Headquarters, New York, 2019.

²United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, CRPD 2006, article 2, item number 5.

the design of products, environments, programs and services that can be used by all persons, as much as possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.

3.- The 2030 Agenda establishes as a Sustainable Development Goal to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, highlighting the goals related to accessible transport, green areas and accessible public spaces, to “not leave anybody behind ”(goal 11.2 and goal 11.7, respectively).

4.- The COVID-19 pandemic and its disproportionately negative effects on persons with disabilities and older persons have also highlighted persistent deficiencies in accessibility in cities and rural settings.

5.- Difficulties of accessibility to the physical space of some hospitals and other health centers have been observed, as well as access to health goods and technologies, poor access to information in accessible formats such as sign language, Braille, augmentative and alternative modes, means, and formats of communication; transport without full accessibility, the persistent difficulties in a quarantine situation to find food, medicine, and in some cases water; and general protocols that do not always make persons with disabilities and older persons visible. At the same time, deficiencies show that many persons are still unaware of persons with disabilities and older persons as rights holders with full legal

capacity to make their own decisions, with support if necessary, and their right to reasonable accommodation.³

6.- Many persons with disabilities and older persons live in poverty and marginality, aggravated by the lack of accessibility. The pandemic is currently increasing this multidimensional poverty.

7.- "When the interconnection of multiple barriers is identified can planners begin to steer contemporary cities towards more inclusive urban futures". "When a city plants the seed of accessibility, public perceptions on the importance of equity and inclusion in that city also take hold."⁴

8.- Local governments and their authorities are in direct contact with the population of their respective jurisdictions, to meet their needs during the COVID 19 emergency and to interact with central governments for the welfare of citizens (neighbors).

9.- Consequently, we call on the leadership of local and regional governments to effectively consolidate the universal accessibility of cities and human settlements, as an effective way to fulfill human rights and overcome poverty, counting for this with the Human Rights model recognized in the United Nations Convention on

³United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, CRPD 2006, article 2, item number 4.

⁴Victor Santiago Pineda: Building the Inclusive City. Governance, Access and the Urban Transformation of Dubai.

the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, the New Urban Agenda, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Strategy of the WHO Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities, always taking into account the reality of each local context and the needs and proposals of citizens.

10.- In order to comply with the current legal obligation of universal accessibility and for cities and rural environments in the near future after the pandemic, local and regional governments will be effective actors in the implementation of an inclusive and fully participatory response of persons with disabilities and older persons through their representative organizations, without discrimination, eliminating all kinds of prejudices, stereotypes and harmful practices.

11.- An inclusive and fully participatory response must consider the formulation of inclusive urban policies, plans, legislation, programs and strategies, capacity building, and the collection of data and statistics for implementation. This implies the allocation of a specific budget and the evaluation and participatory monitoring of organized civil society of persons with disabilities and older persons in compliance with policies, plans, legislation, programs and strategies on universal accessibility.

12.- We call on United Cities and Local Governments UCLG, as an organization and global network inspired by the Sustainable Development Goals, and as a voice of local and regional governments for the welfare of citizens, to reinforce

the work on universal accessibility as a key to sustainable development, through specific strategies and mechanisms among its partners.

13.- The Global Compact on Inclusive and Accessible Cities will be an effective alternative for dialogue with UCLG, with cities, with local authorities and professionals, to exchange knowledge and good practices on inclusive urban development, as well as create partnerships for accelerate its implementation and sustainability.

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