

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**REMARKS AT LAUNCH OF POLICY BRIEF
ON PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AND COVID-19**

New York, 5 May 2020 (recorded 4 May)

The COVID-19 crisis is affecting every aspect of our societies, revealing the extent of exclusion that the most marginalized members of society experience.

Today, I would like to highlight how the pandemic is affecting the world's 1 billion people with disabilities.

Even under normal circumstances, persons with disabilities are less likely to access education, healthcare and income opportunities or participate in the community.

This is exacerbated for those in humanitarian and fragile contexts.

People with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty, and they experience higher rates of violence, neglect and abuse.

The pandemic is intensifying these inequalities -- and producing new threats.

Today we are launching a report that recommends a disability-inclusive response and recovery for everyone.

People with disabilities are among the hardest hit by COVID-19.

They face a lack of accessible public health information, significant barriers to implement basic hygiene measures, and inaccessible health facilities.

If they contract COVID-19, many are more likely to develop severe health conditions, which may result in death.

The share of COVID-19 related deaths in care homes -- where older people with disabilities are overrepresented -- ranges from 19 per cent to an astonishing 72 per cent.

In some countries, healthcare rationing decisions are based on discriminatory criteria, such as age or assumptions about quality or value of life, based on disability.

We cannot let this continue.

We must guarantee the equal rights of people with disabilities to access healthcare and lifesaving procedures during the pandemic.

Persons with disabilities who faced exclusion in employment before this crisis, are now more likely to lose their job and will experience greater difficulties in returning to work.

Yet, only 28 per cent of people with significant disabilities have access to benefits -- and only 1 per cent in low-income countries.

People with disabilities -- particularly, women and girls -- face a greater risk of domestic violence, which has surged during the pandemic.

I urge governments to place people with disabilities at the center of COVID-19 response and recovery efforts and to consult and engage people with disabilities.

Persons with disabilities have valuable experience to offer of thriving in situations of isolation and alternate working arrangements.

Looking to the future, we have a unique opportunity to design and implement more inclusive and accessible societies to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Last year, I launched the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy to ensure the UN system is doing its part.

The Strategy represents the UN's commitment to achieve transformative and lasting change.

When we secure the rights of people with disabilities, we are investing in our common future.