



COVID-19 DISABILITY RIGHTS MONITOR

Key findings and recommendations

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COVID-19 Disability Rights Monitor

- On 20 April 2020, members of the Coordinating Group launched a major global initiative to conduct **rapid independent monitoring of state measures** concerning the impact of COVID-19 on persons with disabilities.
- To identify what states were doing to protect core rights of persons with disabilities, including the right to life, access to health and essential services.
- To highlight the particular issues faced by persons with disabilities in situations of heightened vulnerability during the COVID pandemic, including those living in institutions and their own homes, children, older persons, those who are homeless and people in rural settings.

The survey

The survey was comprised of three components, each targeting key stakeholders:

- Collect official information from **Governments**
- Obtain information from the **national human rights monitoring mechanisms**
- Hear **testimonies by persons with disabilities and their representative organisations**, as well as their assessments of state actions taken to protect fundamental rights.

The survey

- Published in 25 languages on a specially-designed website – www.covid-drm.org
- Disseminated throughout the Coordinating Group's international networks in on-line and Word format
- It remained open for three months, from 20 April until 8 August 2020
- There were 2,152 responses collected from people in 134 countries. The survey received an overwhelming number of responses from persons with disabilities (863), their representative organisations (525), and their family members (448).
- Respondents provided more than 3,000 written testimonies documenting the experiences of persons with disabilities and their family members during the pandemic.
- Three emergency statements were released while the data analysis was ongoing. The statements called on governments to take immediate action to i) [end the catastrophic human rights abuses in institutions](#); ii) [end police violence and brutality](#); and iii) [ensure access to food, medication, and other essential supplies](#).
- An [urgent action](#) was also initiated concerning the situation in residential institutions and calling for persons with disabilities to be immediately provided access to COVID-19 treatment in Romania.

Key findings

- **The states have overwhelmingly failed to take sufficient measures to protect the rights of persons with disabilities in their responses to the pandemic.**
- **One of the most common faults has been the failure to genuinely include persons with disabilities in the collective response – both at national and global levels.**
- **Pivotal role in addressing the pandemic was played by DPOs and other CSOs**

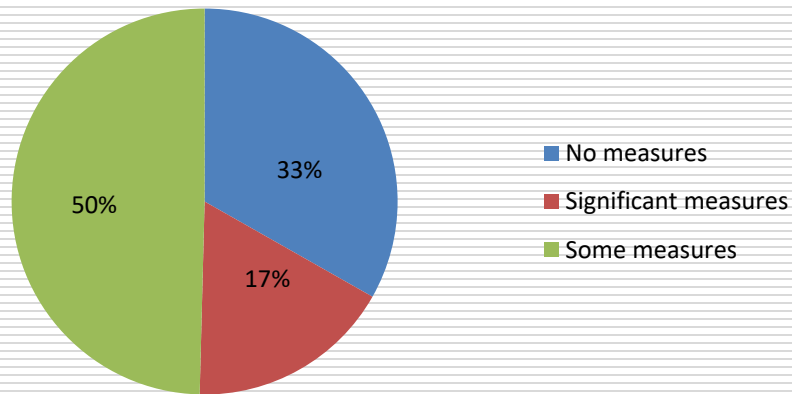
The report is organised around four themes which emerged during the process of analysing responses received to the survey. These themes are:

- Inadequate measures to protect PwD in **institutions**
- Significant and fatal breakdown of **community supports**
- Disproportionate impact on **underrepresented groups** of persons with disabilities
- Denial of access to **healthcare**

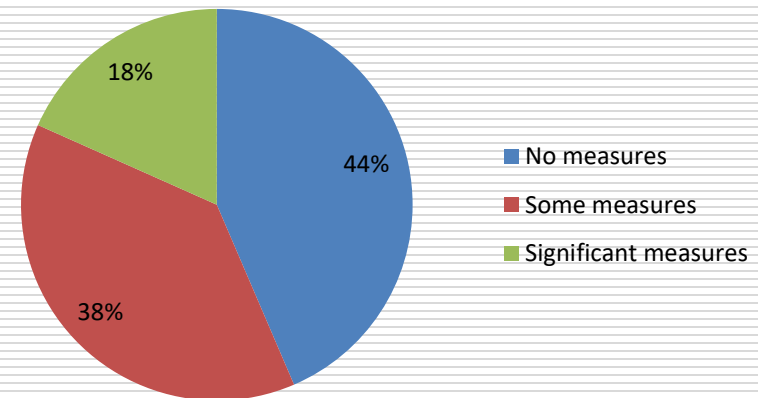
Inadequate measures to protect persons with disabilities in institutions

- The findings of the COVID-19 DRM survey suggest that governments around the world have failed to protect the right to life of persons with disabilities in institutions during the pandemic.
- **Large- and small-scale institutions have become the epicentre of COVID-19 infections and deaths**
These institutions include group homes, psychiatric hospitals, retirement homes for older persons with disabilities, residential schools for children, and other residential settings where persons with disabilities are detained against their will.

Has the government taken measures to protect the life, health and safety of persons with disabilities in institutions?



Has the government taken measures to protect children with disabilities in residential schools?



Social isolation in institutions

A respondent with disabilities described the conditions inside the Herron residence in Quebec:

The other residents were malnourished, dehydrated, and severely neglected. The institution was “dangerously understaffed. There were people dead in their beds, others laying on the floor and some others with three layers of diapers and dehydrated.”

- A Bulgarian organisation of persons with disabilities feared that the measures that were taken to **“prevent infection, but it is also a measure that could lead to a lack of care, lack of transparency and concealment of dangerous abuses.”**
- A Greek organisation of persons with disabilities described the psychiatric institutions as **“hermetically sealed with more absolute restrictions than before, with no possibility of visits, with no advocacy services and with no independent monitoring.”**
- A German respondent feared that **“the measures may help to prevent infection from COVID-19. But the psychosocial impact on people with disabilities cannot be underestimated.”**

Significant and fatal breakdown of community supports

Services and supports that PwD were not able to access due to the pandemic	Percentage	Number of respondents
No access to personal assistance	38%	809
No access to informal care	33%	708
No access to home support	29%	604
No access to assistive technology	23%	490

A representative of an organisation of persons with disabilities in Uganda said:

“Due to isolation and social restrictions it has caused a lot of fear and psychological pain, anxiety, with uncertainty about what will happen next. This may culminate into an increase in mental breakdowns and increase in suicide cases.”

Persons with disabilities around the world reported that they lost their independence during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some persons with disabilities said that they were forced to rely on their family members, charities, or NGOs for survival. An Italian respondent with disabilities said “I am afraid that my mum will die of exhaustion and then I will die without her assistance.”

Disproportionate impact on underrepresented groups

- Children with disabilities and their families

“Many school-going children with disabilities have not been considered in the newly introduced school radio program and are left out in these school radio programs.”
- Women and girls with disabilities

“I am an abuse survivor, and I cannot access services for survivors. No one cares about medical trauma connected to sexual abuse.”
- Homeless persons with disabilities

A Rwandan respondent with disabilities said that “wanderers with psychosocial disability... have been removed to a psychiatric facility to keep them inside by force. They are provided with minimal assistance.”
- PwD in remote and rural areas

The majority of respondents (59%, 792) said that no measures were taken by their government to protect persons with disabilities in remote and rural areas.

Denial of access to healthcare

- A person with disabilities in South Africa said:
“Conditions like mine need continual care and medical expertise... I can’t see my pain specialist, and he can’t operate on me, because he works out a hospital that isn’t allowing visitors.”
- A family member from Norway said that
“general and specialised healthcare has been restricted to reduce the spread of the virus, resulting in many people not receiving rehabilitation at all or being waitlisted or treated
- A representative of an organisation of persons with disabilities in the United Kingdom said:
“A eugenics programme has been undertaken covertly... Do Not Resuscitate Notices (DNRs) were placed on people with no consultation, especially older persons and persons with learning disabilities.”

Recommendations

1. Enact emergency deinstitutionalisation plans, **as informed by persons with disabilities and their representative organisations**, including adopting an immediate ban on institutional admissions during and beyond the pandemic, and the transfer of funding from institutions into community supports and services.
2. Guarantee **full participation, meaningful involvement, and leadership of persons with disabilities and their representative organisations at every stage of planning and decision-making processes in COVID-19 responses**. Take steps to meaningfully involve children and young people with disabilities and their families and caregivers in the design and implementation of all policies in response to the pandemic.
3. Ensure that emergency responses are **disability-inclusive** and take into account the diverse and individual needs of persons with disabilities, in particular those experiencing intersectional forms of discrimination and marginalisation such as women and girls with disabilities, persons living in rural or remote areas, deaf and hard of hearing persons, persons with deaf blindness, persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, and persons with autism.

Recommendations

4. Ensure that all recovery efforts **protect the rights to life, health, liberty**, freedom from torture, ill-treatment, exploitation, violence and abuse, the rights to independent living and inclusion in the community, and to inclusive education, among others, for persons with disabilities without any discrimination on the basis of disability.
5. Ensure that all persons with disabilities have **immediate access to food, medicine, and other essential supplies**.
6. Ensure that persons with disabilities have **equal access to basic, general, specialist, and emergency health care** and that triage policies never discriminate on the basis of disability or impairment.
7. Allocate **adequate financial and human resources** to ensure that persons with disabilities are not left behind in the COVID-19 response and in the recovery process.
8. Provide **economic, financial, and social support** to ensure that persons with disabilities can enjoy their right to fully participate in the community on an equal basis with others, including having access to personal assistance at all times.
9. Prioritise **inclusive education for children and young people with disabilities**, especially children and young people living in congregate care. Ensure alternative education provision is accessible and provides reasonable accommodations based on the individual needs of children and young people with disabilities to guarantee their right to education.
10. Prioritise the **dissemination of comprehensive and accessible information** in a variety of formats for persons with disabilities concerning the pandemic, response efforts, and public health information and guidance.
11. Provide **disability-awareness training** for police and law enforcement authorities, and accountability for disproportionate enforcement of public health-related restrictions. Ensure access to justice for persons with disabilities who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing abuse, violence, or exploitation as a result of emergency measures.

CRPD Working Group on DI

- CRPD Committee has launched online regional consultations with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations:
“From isolation, invisibility and segregation into inclusion of persons with disabilities in the community. Identifying and overcoming barriers to the successful process of deinstitutionalization”
- A series of regional consultations will take place between the members of the [Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (the Committee) and persons with disabilities, through their representative organizations, during the first half of 2021.
- The Committee, based on the contributions, will prepare a first draft Guidelines on Deinstitutionalization, including in emergency situations. The ultimate goal is to reinforce the operationalisation of [the right to living independently and being included in the community \(article 19\)](#), the Committee’s [General comment No. 5 \(2017\) on living independently and being included in the community](#) and its [Guidelines on liberty and security of the person \(2015\)](#).
- 2 consultations held: Central Asia and Eastern Europe and Central and South America
- **Date for Consultation for Asia-Pacific still not confirmed**

Thank you for your attention!

Contact information:
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Survey results and the report are available at:

www.covid-drm.org

<https://www.covid-drm.org/en/statements/covid-19-disability-rights-monitor-report-highlights-catastrophic-global-failure-to-protect-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities>