

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Webinar: Protecting and Empowering Persons with Disabilities in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic

15 May 2020 (Friday), 9:00 - 11:00 hours, Thailand Standard Time

Concept Note

I. Background

Asia and the Pacific is home to an estimated 690 million persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities face barriers to full and effective participation in society, with many experiencing intersecting disadvantages arising from disabilities interacting with other parameters, including gender, age, income, place of residence and ethnicity.

Many persons with disabilities are poor and in vulnerable employment or self-employment, without adequate social protection. ESCAP research indicates that the difference in poverty rates between persons with disabilities and the general population can be as high as 20.6 per cent. Furthermore, persons with disabilities are two to six times less likely to be employed than those without disabilities.

These disadvantaged circumstances make persons with disabilities even more vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially those with existing health conditions. Certain containment measures, including social distancing and self-isolation, may be difficult. For example, persons with cerebral palsy and persons with muscular dystrophy may need assistance from care attendants to manage the activities of daily living. Persons with intellectual disabilities may require support for meeting their daily needs. As for most people who were already financially insecure or living on the margins before the pandemic, COVID-19 has wiped out livelihood prospects for persons with disabilities.

In the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, governments have the responsibility to mainstream disability inclusion into pandemic responses to safeguard the health, survival, well-being and rights of persons with disabilities.

Due to the unprecedented spread and scale of the COVID-19 pandemic, most governments, including those in Asia and the Pacific, are facing new challenges in mounting coordinated and effective responses to protect their populations.

II. Objectives and themes

Against this background, ESCAP, in collaboration with Ms. Maria Soledad Cisternas Reyes, Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility, is organizing a webinar with the following objectives:

- A. To identify, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, gaps and challenges in addressing the acute and longer-term needs of persons with disabilities; and

- B. To explore collaboration focused on the economic and social empowerment of persons with disabilities, and based on harnessing synergies and comparative advantages among governments, organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), other civil society entities, private sector entities and other stakeholders.

III. Target audience

The webinar aims to involve participants from the following groups:

- ESCAP members and associate members, including representatives from ministries responsible for social affairs/welfare, health, education, labour/human resources development, local government, home affairs, as well as other concerned ministries;
- Organizations of persons with disabilities;
- Other civil society organizations, as well as private sector entities with experience in disability inclusion and insights regarding creative options for the economic and social empowerment of persons with disabilities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Persons with diverse disabilities, parents and supporters with insights regarding types of support required for the economic and social empowerment of persons with disabilities in relation to COVID-19 fallout; and
- United Nations Country Teams and other entities with a responsibility to support and promote disability inclusion.

IV. Format and modalities

A. Keynote address:

To underscore the responsibility of governments as duty bearers in upholding the rights of persons with disabilities, Ms. Maria Soledad Cisternas Reyes, Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility, will deliver the keynote address on rights-based approaches to protecting and empowering persons with disabilities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

B. Experience-sharing:

Real-life challenges faced by persons with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic will be shared via a video on “Leave Us Not Behind”.

C. Policy crucible:

There will be a panel discussion on the theme of developing and delivering disability-inclusive responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Each panelist will be invited to draw on their experience and insights, share case studies and make policy recommendations on the areas of expertise.

After the first round of discussions, webinar interventions shall be invited from participants, representing various stakeholders. Through concise interventions not exceeding two minutes each, participants may: (i) raise questions to the panelists; and/or (ii) share good practices on practical responses to the needs of persons with disabilities during COVID-19, policy design and implementation in the COVID-19 context.

D. Reflections on the way forward:

A leader of the Asia-Pacific disability community will share reflections on how governments, persons with disabilities, civil society organizations, as well as parliamentarians/elected representatives could move forward in partnership to protect and empower persons with disabilities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The webinar will be broadcasted live on Youtube; a recording will also be available on Youtube after the event.

Real-time captioning and sign-language interpretation will be available.

V. Contact for further information

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WEBINAR: PROTECTING AND EMPOWERING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

9:00 - 11:00 am, 15 May 2020

❖ Moderator: Mr. Kaveh Zahedi, Deputy Executive Secretary, ESCAP

Time	Description
9:00 - 9:15	Opening <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opening remarks: Mr. Kaveh Zahedi, Deputy Executive Secretary, ESCAP Keynote address: Ms. Maria Soledad Cisternas Reyes, Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rights-based approaches to protecting and empowering persons with disabilities in the context of COVID-19
9:15 - 9:25	Experience-sharing by person with disabilities: “Leave Us Not Behind” [video]
9:25 - 10:45	Policy Crucible <p><i>I. PANELIST DISCUSSION</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Representative, China Disabled Persons’ Federation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whole-of-nation approach across ministries, administrative levels, and diverse sectors, to ensure disability-inclusion in the COVID-19 response Mr. Masahito Kawamori, Co-chair, Focus Group on Media Accessibility, International Telecommunication Union: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How governments and OPDs can ensure diverse disability groups in rural, remote and urban settings have access to public information on COVID-19 Mr. Stephen Sui, Senior Expert and former Secretary of Labour and Welfare, Government of Hong Kong, China: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designing and delivering social protection and employment promotion measures for persons with disabilities in the COVID-19 context Ms. Anjee Agarwal, Executive Director, Samarthyaam, and Member, National Institution for Transforming India (NITI)-CSO Standing Committee, India: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership role of OPDs and other CSOs in policy design and service delivery, to ensure disability-inclusion in pandemic responses Integration of gender perspectives into disability-inclusive responses to address the specific and multiple challenges for women and girls in the COVID-19 pandemic Ms. Valerie Julliland, United Nations Resident Coordinator, Nepal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Role of United Nations Country Teams in advocating for disability inclusion in pandemic responses <p><i>II. STRUCTURED INTERVENTIONS FROM THE FLOOR*</i></p>
10:45 - 11:00	Closing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflections on the way forward: Mr. Monthian Buntan, Senator, Parliament of Thailand, Member, United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and ESCAP Champion for the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013-2022

*As part of the Policy Crucible, structured interventions from the participants (not exceeding two minutes each) will be invited on the following topics:

- **Policy challenges to and good practices on mainstreaming disability inclusion into pandemic policy measures**
- **Innovative solutions to protecting the rights of persons with diverse disabilities and to providing continued care and support amidst lockdown and public health concerns: case studies on the following:**
 - Developing disability-inclusive responses at the municipal level
 - Ensuring continued access to goods and services, e.g., addressing issues pertaining to movement beyond the home
 - Providing disability-specific support services
 - Addressing specific needs of certain disability groups, e.g., children and adults with autism, and persons with dementia
- **Good practices of private sector organizations in supporting accessible telecommuting and other support measures for employees with disabilities:**
- **Good practices at community-level and grassroot-level on protecting and empowering persons with disabilities, especially those with multiple disadvantages:**