



DISABILITY INCLUSIVE COVID-19 RESPONSE

BEST PRACTICES



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Disability Inclusive COVID-19 Response: Best Practices

The project is a joint initiative developed as part of the UN Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD).

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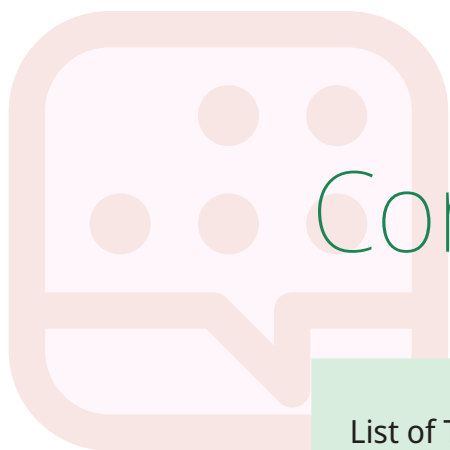
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Abbreviations

CSO	Civil Society Organizations
CwD	Children with Disabilities
DPO	Disabled People's Organization
DRM	Disability Rights Monitor
ICCAR	International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities
IEP	Individualized Education Plan
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISL	Indian Sign Language
LPG	Liquefied Petroleum Gas
MIS	Management Information System
MoE	Ministry of Education
MSME	Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises
NBDN	National Business and Disability Networks
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
NCW	National Commission of Women
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NOD	National Organization on Disability
NPO	Not-for-Profit Organization
NVDA	Non-Visual Desktop Access
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PwD	Persons with Disabilities
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TISS	Tata Institute of Social Sciences
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNPRPD	United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
WCAG	Web Content Accessibility Guidelines
WHO	World Health Organization

UNESCO's work to foster disability inclusion is part and parcel of its commitments to strengthen its anti-racism and anti-discrimination efforts, as called for by Member States in the Global Call against Racism adopted in December 2020. In this regard, UNESCO will develop a Roadmap that seeks to design and implement collective action to combat discrimination in all its forms.

Gabriela Ramos,

UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Social and
Human Sciences

Executive summary

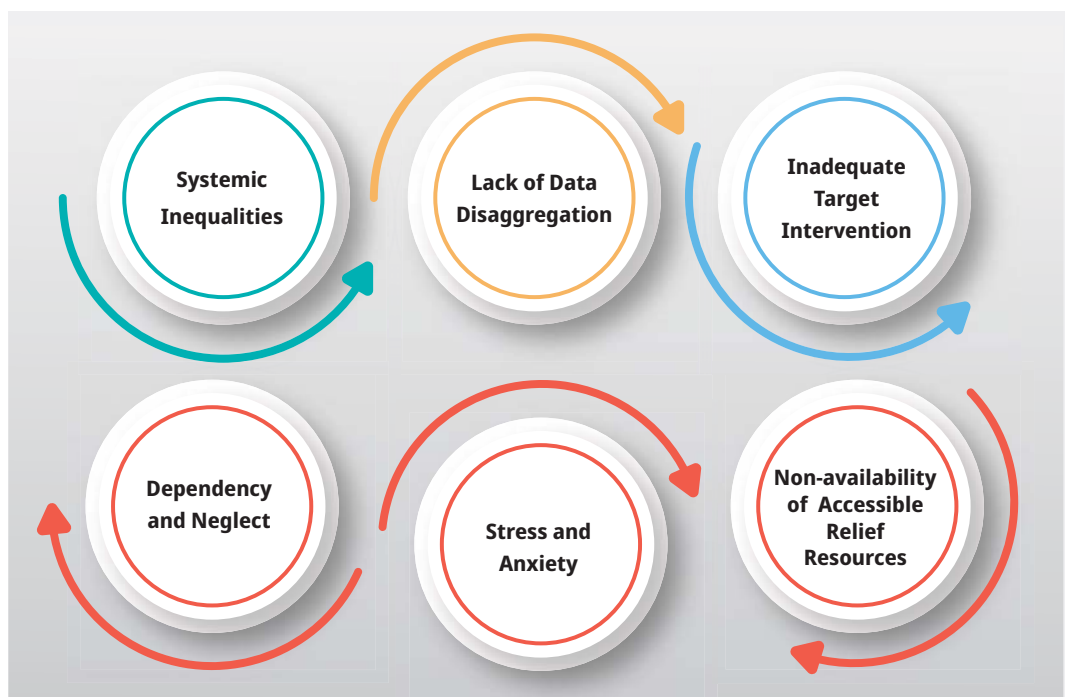
The COVID-19 pandemic has affected people's lives significantly across the world. Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) experiencing intersectional and multiple discrimination as a result of their gender identity, age, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, origin, location, and legal status carry a heavier burden of the immediate and long term economic and social consequences of the pandemic. COVID-19 response and recovery need to respond to their marginalization and ensure that they are not left behind.

The conditions that affect access to important areas like education, health services, jobs, and independent living of PwDs should be explored at the earliest to guarantee the delivery of systematic and long-term inclusive solutions especially at

the local level including in cities.

This brief write-up is a desk research based on secondary data collected and it identifies the challenges that PwDs, including children with disabilities (CwDs) faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. As highlighted in Figure 1, this pandemic brought to light the hard and exacerbated pre-existing inequalities in society. One of the main challenges according to the UN Sustainable Development Goals' Report is the absence of sound disaggregated data for PwDs that worsens their vulnerabilities and limits the international community's ability to fully understand the discrimination and exclusion faced by these people. The required relief services do not reach PwDs which leads to increased difficulties for them and their

FIGURE 1: CHALLENGES AND CONFLICTS CAUSED BY COVID-19



dependence on others.

When mapping the best practices the criteria kept in mind were:

- Practices following the pre-conditions of the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD).
- Programmes in which PwDs had a role

in decision making.

- Services which were provided in various accessible formats.
- Practices which were innovative.
- Practices initiated by the government / non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

These are presented in Table 1

TABLE 1: MAPPING THE BEST PRACTICES

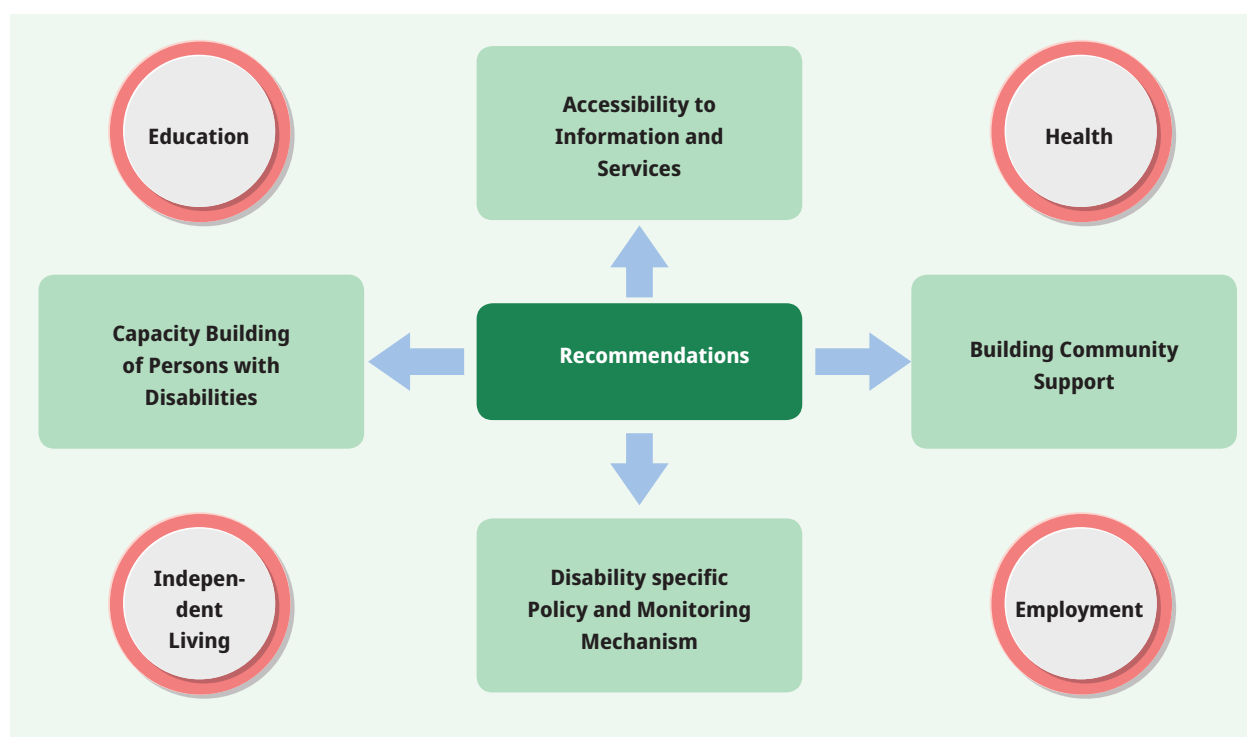
Themes	Responsive Practices				
	Inclusive	Participative	Accessible	Innovative	Legal
Education					
Healthcare					
Employment					
Independent & Safe Living					

After exploring the challenges and analyzing the programmes and practices followed based on various government policies, some practical guidelines and recommendations for states and governmental and local authorities are suggested (Figure 2). These recommendations are made to support the design, planning, and execution of disability inclusive service delivery responses and impartial and accountable humanitarian action especially during the pandemic.

To successfully meet the challenges thrown up by the COVID-19 pandemic and complying with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs) Agenda PwDs cannot be left behind. The information provided by various governments and

institutions both to prevent the infection from spreading and to know how to act in case of illness must be available in accessible formats including sign language, video captioning, the use of alternative text in images and graphics displayed digitally, and easy-to-read versions. Society's sensitization towards PwDs including children and women with disabilities is essential for developing empathetic support and interventions in their education, health services, access to jobs, and independent, safe and dignified living. In the battle against COVID-19, it is also essential to follow the motto of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), 'Nothing about us, without us.' Through their representative organizations PwDs

FIGURE 2: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE THEMES THAT EMERGED



can better advise political authorities to include the disability dimension in their responses that can mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their lives and ensure a sustainable monitoring mechanism. They have to empower themselves to be in control of what happens to them as powerful subjects in civil society and bring about real social and economic changes in line with UNCRPD and the SDGs.

This document brings to light the following key good practices for persons with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery plans:

- Mitigation of intersectional discrimination.
- Accessible education for all.
- Zero discrimination in healthcare.
- An inclusive work environment; no firing and more hiring.
- Community sensitization to provide PwDs a life with dignity and safety.
- Capacity building for empowerment

and self-advocacy.

- Data disaggregation by disability and gender.
- Reaching the unreached; accessibility to information and services.
- Decentralization of practices at municipal, regional, and provincial levels.
- Protection of human rights.

To support a disability inclusive COVID-19 response there needs to be cooperation:

- Between states.
- Between international or regional intergovernmental organizations or NGOs.
- National governments and/or civil society including organizations of PwDs as this is central to the global commitment to UNCRPD and the 2030 agenda for SDGs.

Background

Since the first reported coronavirus case in Wuhan, China in 2019, the outbreak, now known as COVID-19, has spread globally. The World Health Organization (WHO) acknowledged the coronavirus epidemic as a pandemic and declared the outbreak as a public health emergency of international concern. Most regions around the world have been severely affected by the pandemic. The spread of the virus led to global economic and social disruptions and brutally overwhelmed healthcare and educational systems. COVID-19 highlighted the hard and exacerbated pre-existing inequalities in society. It has also laid bare the critical interdependencies between human health, socioeconomic inequalities, and the economy.

While the pandemic threatened all members of society, persons with disabilities (PwDs) were disproportionately impacted due to attitudinal, environmental, and institutional barriers that were reproduced in responses to COVID-19. They faced discrimination while accessing healthcare, livelihoods, income support, participating in online forms of education, and seeking protection from violence.¹

As numerous countries around the globe are facing the challenges posed by the pandemic, it has become abundantly clear that once the crisis is over, we cannot go back to how the world was before it

struck. In this shared tragedy comes an opportunity for humanity to build back better and put human rights at the heart of recovery. To recover better means fixing inequalities within and among countries, addressing the climate especially at city levels, and creating a world that is inclusive and equal and therefore resilient and prepared to face future disasters.²

The United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy provides the foundation for sustainable and transformative progress on disability inclusion through all pillars of United Nations' work: peace and security, human rights, and development. UNESCO provides technical support to its Member States to comply with UNCRPD and SDGs' international norms and standards. UNESCO, in partnership with key stakeholders in the disability sector, offered a dedicated platform to popular disability advocates to amplify the voices of PwDs during the COVID-19 pandemic and to call for specific action by decision makers and frontline professionals. UNCRPD and SDGs cannot be implemented without strong action at the local level. While UNCRPD is a legally binding international treaty signed by various state parties, the responsibility for implementing it falls on all levels of government.

As the closest level to citizens and communities, cities need to translate international commitments into concrete

¹ Smirnova, M. and Palmora, N. (eds). A Decade Of Making Cities Inclusive, Available at: https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Eurocities-report_A-new-decade-of-making-cities-disability-inclusive.pdf

² United Nations Human Rights (2020). Covid-19 and The Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Disability/COVID-19_and_The_Rights_of_Persons_with_Disabilities.pdf

realities with tangible impact on improving people's lives.

Cities are at the forefront of the social dimension of any crisis, social policy response, and service delivery. Cities are within the proximity of the population and they possess the autonomy and political will to address the crisis first hand. Disability inclusion should therefore be an integral part of the interventions used by the cities to combat the challenges of the pandemic.

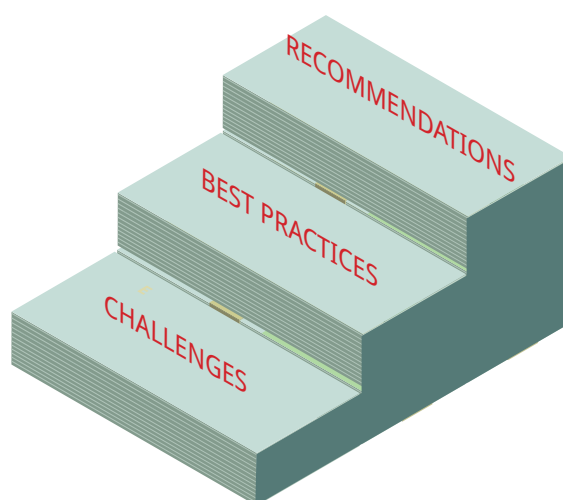
This document maps the relevant programmes and practices on education, health, employment, and independent living of PwDs during the crisis. The primary responsibility for providing them basic services lies with local bodies and cities even if there are numerous enabling policies at the national level. This document's aim is presenting

The approach followed in preparing this Practical Guide is summarized as:

examples of good practices to help rural areas/local bodies/cities initiate disability inclusive COVID-19 responses.

This document is written with the following objectives:

- identifying the challenges,
- showcasing best practices, and
- proposing recommendations to create an inclusive COVID response by society



TRACKING THE BEST PRACTICES

Mapping best practices based on pre-conditions of UNPRPD (refer to Table 2) that show inclusion of PwDs in areas of education, health, employment, and independent and safe living during the COVID-19 pandemic.

SHARING SUCCESS STORIES

On the basis of a review and mapping of practices, the challenges faced and some solutions found for inclusion of PwDs in mainstream life during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN INCLUSIVE COVID-19 RESPONSE

On the basis of the review recommendations for providing access to education to children with disabilities (CwDs), access to health information and treatment, creating inclusive work environments, and independent living.

TABLE 2: THE UNPRPD PRE-CONDITIONS NECESSARY FOR ENSURING DISABILITY INCLUSION ACROSS POLICIES, SERVICES, AND OTHER INTERVENTIONS

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION	Sectors like health and education should be aware of all types of disabilities and their obligations to ensure that PwDs can access required support services.
SERVICE DELIVERY	Services such as education, vocational training, health, access to justice, emergency services, social protection, and recreational services need to mainstream disability inclusion and identify structures, plans, and measures to ensure they are available, accessible, adequate, and affordable for PwDs.
ACCESSIBILITY	CRPD requires states to remove barriers and obstacles to accessibility on an equal basis with others to the physical environment, to transportation, and to information and communication.
PARTICIPATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES	Active and informed participation of PwDs in decisions that affect them is consistent with a human rights-based approach, free from stigma. And ensures good governance and accountability.
CRPD-COMPLIANT BUDGETING AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT	CRPD-compliant budgeting and financial management should ensure that the services are accessible to PwDs, thus decreasing their need to bear the burden or be excluded due to additional costs.
ACCOUNTABILITY AND GOVERNANCE	Programmes that target the general population such as education or health through Management Information Systems (MIS), should collect better disability-disaggregated data so that mainstream services can better accommodate PwDs.

The following sections highlight the impact of COVID-19 on different spheres of life of PwDs; the challenges faced by them; and some best practices from across cities and nations.

Impact of COVID-19 on the Education of CwDs

This section highlights the challenges related to education faced by CwDs due to the pandemic. It also throws light on the best practices adopted by various cities and nations to tackle the learning crisis, and makes recommendations to reduce the learning gaps experienced by CwDs.

Challenges related to education faced by CwDs

The COVID-19 pandemic overwhelmed the functioning and outcomes of education systems. This is true across the world and it has affected all children, though to differing degrees depending

on multiple factors including the country or region where they live as well as their age, family background, and degree of access to some 'substitute' educational opportunities during the pandemic. The effect of the pandemic on CwDs was manifold. Not only did these children lack daily access to schools and the basic support that schools provide to them, but they also lost out on therapies and early interventions. Further, often, they are accustomed to structured schedules and learning environments. Sudden and unwarranted alterations in the learning process during the lockdown have increased the burden on these children as

FIGURE 4: EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES FACED BY CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES



well as their parents. The COVID-19 crisis worsened the opportunity and enrichment gaps that put CwDs at a disadvantage relative to their non-disabled peers.

To reduce the impact of disruptions in education, there was a shift to remote learning practices. However, learners with disabilities faced barriers on account of the absence of required equipment, lack of access to the internet, accessible

material, and support necessary for them to follow online school programmes. As a result, many learners with disabilities were left behind. They also missed out on interactions with their peers which is so important for their socialization and recreation.

Parents struggled to manage their children who showed aggressive behaviour at times. In particular children

FIGURE 5: CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY PARENTS OF CWDs

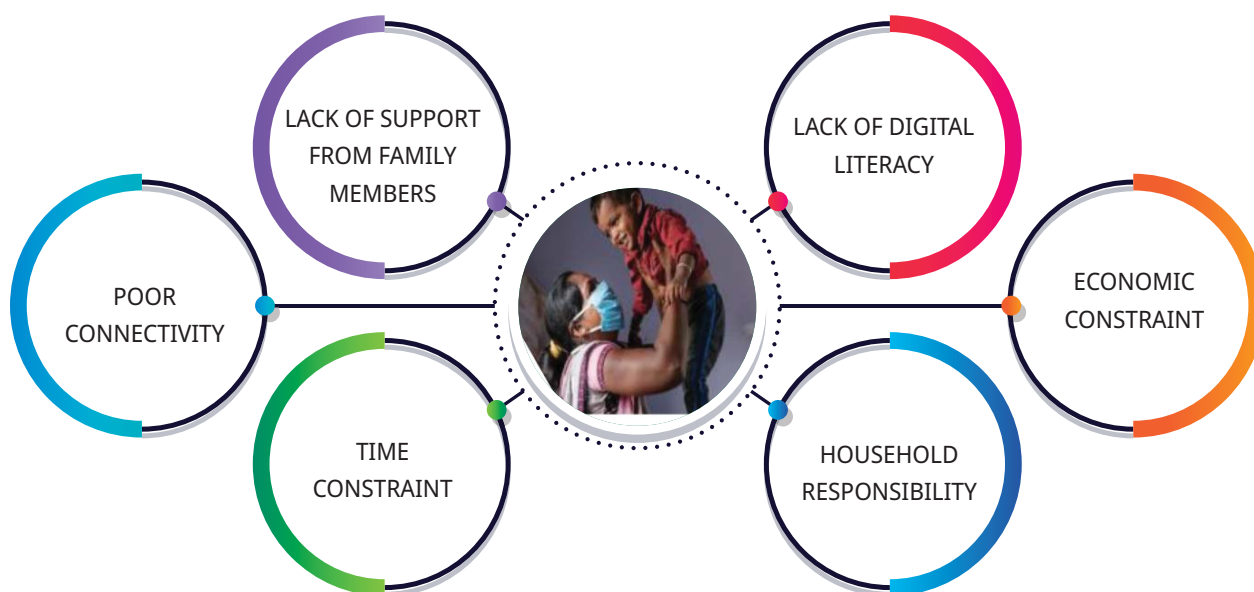
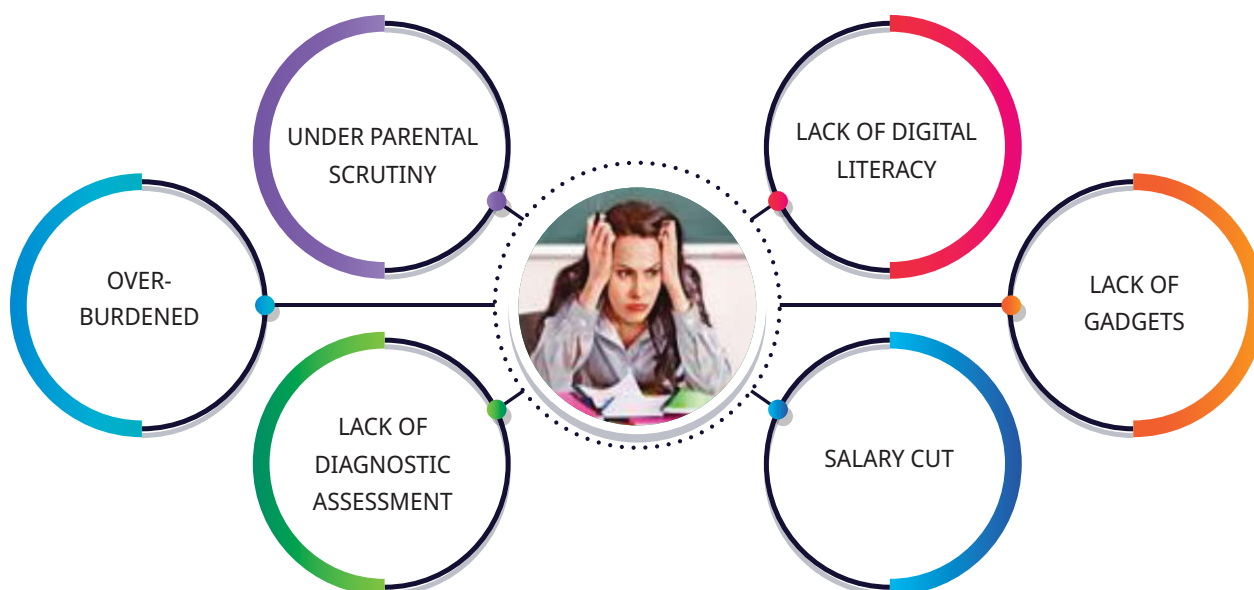


FIGURE 6: CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY EDUCATORS TO COPE WITH CHANGES DUE TO PANDEMIC



with autism, intellectual disabilities, and multiple disabilities were unable to understand the gravity of the situation as the pandemic spread across the globe.

Parents from low socioeconomic strata can barely make both ends meet so they could neither afford online education nor did they have the time to sit with the children during their online classes. Many were also not well versed in the use of technology. Further, access to free school meals is one more aspect that parents and children lost out on due to schools being shut during the pandemic.

Concerned with the negative impact of school closures on disadvantaged and marginalized children and youth, UNESCO called for the creation of an Open Global Education Coalition with due focus on equity and inclusion.³ The Coalition worked with governments and provided capacity development to the Ministries of Education (MoE) to run distance learning solutions in response to the crisis. It mobilized a wide array of public and private partners and leveraged resources, knowledge, and innovations to deploy and defend universal access and equitable solutions. UNESCO's support focused on ensuring learning continuity and building resilient education systems for the future through capacity-building for ministries and teachers and developing relevant content. It was the collective responsibility of governments, teachers, parents, and caregivers to help reduce educational inequalities for learners with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To ease and help parents cope with challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, UNESCO New Delhi and the UNESCO Chair in Community Management of Disabilities (University of Calicut) launched a booklet for parents and caregivers of CwDs, *Life in the Times of COVID-19: A Guide for Parents of Children with Disabilities*. 'The guide is action-oriented and would help serve all families with special needs in dealing with the extreme crisis of COVID-19'

- Eric Falt, UNESCO New Delhi Director⁴

³ Global Education Coalition (2020) Available at <https://en.unesco.org/news/global-education-coalition-explores-digital-learning-turn-africa>

⁴ Life in the times of COVID-19, Another COVID-19 Front line: Parents of children with disabilities. Available at: <https://en.unesco.org/news/another-covid-19-front-line-parents-children-disabilities>

Best Practices

Despite the overwhelming consequences of the pandemic, this global crisis is also an extraordinary time for learning about how educational systems, policymakers, teachers, students, and families become adaptable and resilient. Some examples of the effectiveness of remote learning solutions and the role of teachers in facilitating learning are now shared.

- Many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean developed and implemented measures from the first months of the pandemic to guarantee educational continuity for children and adolescents with disabilities despite the suspension of face-to-face classes at all levels⁵.
- In several countries online material and resources were offered with accessibility criteria through digital platforms along with television and radio like in Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica (the 'I learn at home' programme), Cuba (TVEducativaMINED), Ecuador, El Salvador (the 'Let's learn at home' programme), and Peru ('Learn at home'). These initiatives had a greater scope than virtual platforms given the differences in connectivity and access to the internet in different regions in some countries.⁶
- In Uruguay,⁷ some practices were identified from the Resource Centre for Deaf Students (CeReSo) where sign language interpreters in small cities developed close community support networks to collectively support deaf students.
- In Belize,⁸ a virtual portal uploaded daily lessons for children in images, videos, and audio.
- Colombia⁹ reinforced the Conver-TIC programme by the ICT Ministry aimed at blind or low vision people to download the Jaws and ZoomText software for free. Along with this, virtual training was provided through the INCI Learning Platform in different areas aimed at meeting the educational needs of students with visual disabilities.
- In Guatemala,¹⁰ the platform 'I learn at home' was created by the Ministry of Education to support teachers and students at different educational levels to access digital resources from home. The videos were accessible to people with hearing impairment. Learning guides through audio recordings were also produced to allow reading for students with blindness, low vision, or those with limited access to printed text.

⁵ Learn at Home. Available at: <https://www.redacademica.edu.co/estrategias/aprende-en-casa>

⁶ Learn at Home. Available at: <https://www.redacademica.edu.co/estrategias/aprende-en-casa>

⁷ Learn at Home. Available at: <https://www.redacademica.edu.co/estrategias/aprende-en-casa>

⁸ Learn at Home. Available at: <https://www.redacademica.edu.co/estrategias/aprende-en-casa>

⁹ INCI Learning Platform. Available at: <https://elearning.inci.gov.co/>

¹⁰ Learn at Home. Available at: <https://www.redacademica.edu.co/estrategias/aprende-en-casa>

The findings of the research by Sharma and May¹¹ (2020) highlighted that:

- ***Schools and teachers who invested additional efforts in building strong connections with learners and their families reported improved engagement with all children, including those with additional learning needs.***
- ***Many parents described how much they valued the increased communication with teachers during COVID-19, reporting a greater awareness of their children's learning needs.***
- ***Learners were provided telephone numbers of their teachers or of the educational support staff to call if they needed additional support.***
- ***School leaders provided additional time to teachers to plan teaching activities and gave them more autonomy.***
- ***A flexible approach that took into account individual learning needs of each student was particularly important during COVID-19.***

- In Bogotá,¹² the 'Learn at home' programme coordinated with the District Disability System and the Ministry of Education for incorporating pedagogical strategies for curricular flexibility and home strengthening as a learning environment and a service to citizens through virtual means.
- In General Alvear city (Argentina), an app was used as an alternative communication system to facilitate learning and recreation for people with multiple disabilities in the context

of the pandemic. It also allowed them to expand personal, family, and social development, and insert themselves in the digital world.

Best practices in support systems

- In Ecuador, the University of Quito established a system to configure the support and reasonable adjustments that students with disabilities needed during the pandemic. A support

¹¹ Sharma, U and May F. (2020). Inclusive education during Covid-19: Lessons from teachers around the world. Available at: <https://lens.monash.edu/@education/2020/10/05/1381365/inclusive-education-during-covid-19-lessons-from-teachers-around-the-world>

¹² Learn at Home. Available at: <https://www.redacademica.edu.co/estrategias/aprende-en-casa>

protocol was set up for students with disabilities and added as part of the university's permanent activities. Support and monitoring mechanisms were activated through different interactive media and social networks during the emergency period.

- In Argentina, a national resolution established the provision of support personnel to students who required it (such as support teachers, non-teaching personal companions, and sign language interpreters) through communication platforms, tele-assistance, and tele-consultations. Besides, a report was requested with the content's details developed and the teaching material used by the students.
- A study¹³ was conducted by research teams in Australia and seven countries -- Austria, Bangladesh, India, New Zealand, Italy, Canada, and Spain – to identify how teachers were responding to the challenges posed by COVID-19 to inclusive education. Interviews were conducted with teachers, school leaders, education support staff, children, and parents to learn more about the adaptations that schools and teachers made to provide inclusive education during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To minimize disruptions in schooling, in the Middle East and South Africa education authorities used blended learning approaches that combined in-person and remote instructions critical for supporting children in recovering and accelerating their learning following the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁴
- UN projections show that COVID-19 may push up to 3 million additional children out of school in Latin America and the Caribbean¹⁵. Since the start of schools being shut about 42 million learners in the region have been receiving distance and home-based learning delivered through radio, television, internet, and other platforms. Before and beyond schools reopening, bridging the current digital gap will help build more resilient education systems to withstand potential future crises together with the private sector.
- Teachers visited the homes and provided one-to-one teaching following COVID-19 protocols in Banyumas, in Central Java. They also made video calls and taught children at home at Ungaran, Indonesia in families from poorer economic backgrounds who were unable to afford internet data or devices and lived in areas with limited internet connectivity.¹⁶
- To ensure educational continuity, Jordan's MoE¹⁷ provided distance learning to all the children. This support included televised lessons broadcast nationally. Digital platforms

¹³ Sharma. U and May F. (2020). Inclusive education during Covid-19: Lessons from teachers around the world. Available at: <https://lens.monash.edu/@education/2020/10/05/1381365/inclusive-education-during-covid-19-lessons-from-teachers-around-the-world>

¹⁴ Awsat A. (2020). COVID-19, an opportunity to bridge the digital gap and reform education systems in the region. UNICEF MENA (Middle East and North Africa 2020). Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/mena/stories/covid-19-opportunity-bridge-digital-gap-and-reform-education-systems-region>

¹⁵ UNICEF Latin America and the Caribbean (2020). Education on hold: A generation of children in Latin America and the Caribbean are missing out on schooling because of COVID-19. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/lac/media/18256/file/Education-on-hold-web-0711.pdf>

¹⁶ United Nations Human Rights: Covid-19 And The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2020). Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Disability/COVID-19_and_The_Rights_of_Persons_with_Disabilities.pdf

¹⁷ UNICEF Jordan- Covid-19 Response (2020). Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/jordan/media/3436/file/COVID19%20Education%20Response.pdf>

were established to facilitate access to educational content. A web-landing page was created for teachers to provide professional development courses focused on new technologies. Learning material tailored for CwDs was distributed to the families affected before the schools closed and this was complemented with videos to help parents continue speech and occupational therapy sessions with their children at home.

‘While the most vulnerable children might not have access to digital learning resources, some governments and civil society organizations have provided these learners with computers or tablets as well as internet access, or they have organized teaching through television, phones or radio

– OECD on Country Policy Responses²⁰

During the pandemic, persons with visual impairment or blindness experienced enormous psychological pressure and infringement of their rights, as they did not have access to almost all modern web resources because they are not adapted for them. As part of the regional COVID-19 crisis response support

programme, ‘ALL IN’ - a youth initiative group in Kyrgyzstan provided access to visually impaired and blind people to a collection of audio books, useful training courses, physical activity, and other necessary information following the requirements of the World Wide Web Consortium for accessibility of web content for people with special needs. Aidai and Darin adapted the platform in **give** languages, thus reaching and influencing the vulnerable populations in developing countries in Central Asia, as well as raising awareness among states and communities about the problem of social integration of visually impaired and blind people in the region.¹⁸

- Capacity building of teachers was initiated at local levels to equip them with skills in technology-based learning in many places around the world. For example, in Indonesia workshops were held for teachers to learn the pedagogy of remote learning. Teachers Preparedness Training Package, the first available in the world, is a kit for teachers that provides guidance and advice on education and teaching in the time of COVID-19 was developed for Middle East and African countries.¹⁹
- In Uruguay,²¹ the Centre for the Deaf Student (CeReSo) organized courses for the whole teaching community, **organized** easy-to-read workshops, **and** training for interpreters on the use of digital video calling platforms. Also in Uruguay the project ‘Inclusion Articulators in Territory’ provided advice to schools regarding inclusive education.

¹⁸ UNESCO (2021). UNESCO supports Youth IT project to support visually impaired people in Central Asia. Available at: <http://en.unesco.kz/unesco-supports-youth-it-project-to-support-visually-impaired-people-in-central-asia>

¹⁹ UNESCO (2021). UNESCO supports Youth IT project to support visually impaired people in Central Asia. Available at: <http://en.unesco.kz/unesco-supports-youth-it-project-to-support-visually-impaired-people-in-central-asia>

²⁰ United Nations Human Rights: Covid-19 And The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2020). Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Disability/COVID-19_and_The_Rights_of_Persons_with_Disabilities.pdf

²¹ Teacher training. Available at: <http://www.cereso.org/docentes.html>

- In Colombia,²² the Down Colombia Association organized 20 pedagogical gatherings in alliance with the Disability Professionals Network including 900 teachers from the public sector. They connected and exchanged good practices from more than 40 speakers with support from a teacher with visual disabilities who shared the strategies that work with children from home.
- In Vietnam,²³ educators, parents, and individual students assessed each student's situation and discussed the adjustments needed for remote learning. For example, including using alternatives to print such as audio or other formats in instruction as well as pictures, flexible scheduling and deadlines, and use of assistive technology.

Strong passion for the vocation
and commitment to help students
experience positive learning
outcomes enabled teachers to cope
with the challenges associated with
COVID-19

- Boratto

- A Harvard Survey²⁴ covering 36 countries that responded to strategies for education continuity revealed partnerships with national educational media and free online learning resources to reach all children.

Some of the findings of the Harvard Survey are:

- ***In New Zealand, a new online learning space, hard copy learning packs, and special television programmes were offered to reach all children.***
- ***The French MoE created and strengthened partnerships with several national media sources such as culture and education-oriented television and radio channels to offer further educational material and reach as many children as possible.***
- ***The Portuguese MoE launched the '#EstudoEmCasa' educational programme to enrich children's education during the crisis. This programme was mainly directed at primary children and broadcast on the public television channel.***
- ***In Colombia, the government developed an online platform with more than 80,000 pedagogical resources to which low-income families had free access.***
- ***In the United Kingdom, Dyslexia Assist and the National Autistic Society developed and shared material for CwDs and their families.***

²² Available at: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3C8-tUyQZkfhsz3_kj-2kg

²³ Huong, D. (2020). UNDP Viet Nam Project, Rapid Assessment of The Socio-Economic Impact Of Covid-19 On Persons With Disabilities In Vietnam. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/PWD%20Report_EN_FINAL.pdf

²⁴ Tackling Coronavirus Covid-19: Contributing to a global effort. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/development-assistance-committee/dac-covid-19-statement.htm>

These findings suggest that despite the many challenges, schools and teachers responded with creativity and flexibility in providing inclusive education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 3 gives some of the challenges and solutions for education of CwDs.

TABLE 3: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS IN EDUCATING CWDs

Key facts	Barriers to education through remote learning practices	Addressing barriers to education
Approximately 15% of the world's population, representing more than 1 billion people, live with disabilities, and 2% to 4% find day- to-day life challenging without assistance.	PwDs are often provided with less help and inadequately trained teachers.	Assessing accommodations: Educators, parents, and individuals assessed each student's situation and discussed adjustments needed for remote learning. For example, including using alternatives to print such as audio or other formats in instruction as well as pictures, flexible scheduling and deadlines, and assistive technology.
Disability is more prevalent in low- and middle-income countries than in high- income countries.	More time and more resources like equipment, internet access, and specially designed material and support is required for learners with disabilities to actively participate in learning. This makes learning costlier for learners and their families.	Modifying curricula and instructions: Learning in remote setting may differ from mainstream, classroom-based environments. This includes expectations of children and course methodology. Curricula must be adjusted often. For Example, homework can be simplified, allowing children to dictate rather than type and audio material can be provided for reading assignments.
An online-based, high-tech approach is not always ideal for creating an inclusive learning environment.	CwDs lost access to school meals and playing with their friends, which are equally important for development and learning.	Using Universal Design for Learning (UDL): UDL aims to help teachers reach a wide variety of children, focusing on how children learn and demonstrate knowledge.
It is unclear how many learners with disabilities received inadequate educational support during the COVID-19 pandemic.	There is no available data on special-education teachers' digital skills in developing or least-developed countries.	Implementing project- based learning: CwDs learn more by using research and analysis complete projects. Project-based learning also improves self-esteem and promotes positive engagement.

Key facts	Barriers to education through remote learning practices	Addressing barriers to education
		Ensuring individualized education programmes (IEPs): IEPs require educators, learners, parents, and families to work together to decide on the effectiveness of a remote-learning setting and how to best proceed with each student's education.
		Supporting teachers: As schools transitioned to online learning during the COVID-19 crisis, it became important to provide teachers with guidance and relevant, evidence-based resources on how to deliver lessons in remote and online settings in special education.
		Providing family and caregiver support: Systemic approaches are necessary to help parents and caregivers with both their domestic responsibilities and students' education.

Source: <https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/empowering-learners-disabilities-during-covid-19-crisis>

India's response to the educational needs of children during the COVID-19 pandemic

In India, despite a legislative framework protecting the right to education for all children, one-fourth of the CwDs between 5-19 years, and three-fourth of 5-year-olds are not enrolled in any formal schooling. Further, CwDs in India are more likely to belong to socioeconomically poor households as compared to other children. Moreover, 72 per cent of the disabled population in India resides in rural areas. Inaccessibility of education for many is thus also a result of poverty.

Comprehensive Disability Inclusive Guidelines for protection and safety of

PwDs during the COVID-19 pandemic discusses providing critical facilities and assistance to people with disabilities.²⁵

Some good examples of education in India during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- The Ministry of Education made efforts to provide education to children in their homes through alternate means of delivery such as distribution of textbooks at the homes

²⁵ Vernekar, N., Pandey, P., and Naina, S. (2020). COVID-19 and Exclusion of Children with Disabilities in Education; Insights from four states. Available at: <https://vidhilegalpolicy.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Vidhi-Report-Inclusive-Education.pdf>

of learners, telephonic guidance by teachers, online and digital content through various media, online classes conducted by teachers, activity-based learning through the Alternate Academic Calendar released by the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT). eContent was developed keeping the universal design of learning in mind.²⁶

- The eVIDYA programme to unify all efforts related to making digital/online education fully accessible to all. It ensures special-content for visual and hearing-impaired children, radio podcasts, revamping of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment for learners with disabilities through all accessible means.²⁷
- Many NGOs in India worked to help CwDs cope with the pandemic. An NGO in Guwahati in Eastern India adopted a mixed model of education. Regular sessions with CwDs, counselling meetings, and parent support group meetings were held via zoom calls. The NGO distributed smart phones to families of children who did not have them so that they too were included and were able to participate in online teaching sessions. Further, strategies were provided to the parents and the NGO worked in collaboration with them. It found considerable improvements and faster achievement of the goals set for the children.²⁸
- An NGO made a film highlighting the plight of PwDs during COVID-19 and the interventions by the organization to support them in different states of India. The film focuses on health, social inclusion, and inclusive education. The NGO reached out to PwDs in states like Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal. A model of tele-education was adapted in 36 districts in Bihar, another state in Eastern India, which involved teaching children through the mobile telephonic network using calls to children through resource personnel.²⁹
- Apart from engaging learners in customized programmes pertaining to movement, gardening, and cooking, an organization in Bengaluru³⁰ in Karnataka organized online performances by artists, giving learners an experience of the spaces that they were always allowed into. This helped in the holistic development of children during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- A charitable trust in Chennai³¹ in South India, shared the lesson plan for the day with parents in advance while regular attempts were made to look for subjects or tasks to undertake at home.
- In some parts of India CwDs were given financial support. Children who did not possess smartphones/ tablets/

²⁶ Vernekar, N., Pandey, P. and Naina S. (2020). COVID-19 and Exclusion of Children with Disabilities in Education; Insights from four states. Available at: <https://vidhilegalpolicy.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Vidhi-Report-Inclusive-Education.pdf>

²⁷ Vernekar, N., Pandey, P. and Naina S. (2020). COVID-19 and Exclusion of Children with Disabilities in Education; Insights from four states. Available at: <https://vidhilegalpolicy.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Vidhi-Report-Inclusive-Education.pdf>

²⁸ Bardalai, K. (2020). How children are coping with disabilities amid COVID-19 pandemic. Available at: <https://www.eastmojo.com/news/2020/09/30/how-children-are-coping-with-disabilities-amid-covid-19-pandemic/>

²⁹ Mohanty, R.N. (2020). Sight savers India Launches Film on COVID Response on International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Available at: https://ngobox.org/full-news_Sightsavers-India-Launches-Film-on-COVID-response-on-the-International-Day-of-Persons-with-Disabilities-Sightsavers%20India_23127

³⁰ Arts and music the path to mental well being of children (2021). Available at: <https://www.ourbetterworld.org/story/nalandaway-follow-up2>

³¹ Mirra Educate empower and embrace, NGO. Available at: <http://mirract.com/about/>

laptops were provided these free or at subsidized rates to pursue online education. Internet packages were provided to learners from economically weaker backgrounds to enable them access to online education. Moreover, where connectivity was an issue, teachers visited neighborhoods with recordings of classes. Teachers used loudspeakers to teach in rural areas where there was no

internet connectivity. Sign language interpretation for online classes was provided for children who are deaf and hard of hearing. Children with visual disabilities were provided accessible study materials of lectures using the daisy standard (digital talking books) that they could view later with screen reader software such as NVDA, Serotek system and ORCA.³²

FIGURE 7: KEY AREAS THAT EMERGED AFTER THE ANALYSIS OF EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES FOLLOWED IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES



³² Comprehensive Disability Inclusive Guidelines (2020). Available at: <http://disabilityaffairs.gov.in/content/page/whats-new.php>

Recommendations based on Policies and Practices

I. Accessibility to information and services

- a. Ensuring provisions for accessible alternative education with individualized reasonable accommodations to guarantee the right of children and youth with disabilities to quality education.
- b. Taking action to bridge the digital divide to increase and improve children's access to remote learning tools.

II. Building community support

- a. Developing teachers' capacity in online teaching and parent engagement.
- b. Providing guidance to parents on supporting CwDs' learning.

III. Disability specific policy and monitoring mechanisms

- a. Providing disaggregated data based on gender, type of disability, and rural or urban location of CwDs to ensure appropriate interventions.
- b. Ensuring all educational plans and programmes are designed with a gender lens and are inclusive of and accessible to girls with disabilities.
- c. Considering financial support for economically deprived CwDs and their families for sustaining their education.
- d. Tracking the number of children affected by school closures to ensure that they return to schools when they reopen.
- e. Monitoring and implementing the health, safety, and resurgence protocols in schools.

IV. Capacity building of CwDs

- a. Ensuring training for CwDs in the use of technology and digital platforms for their inclusion in education.

Impact of COVID-19 on the Health of PwDs

This section talks about the health or medical challenges faced by PwDs due to the pandemic. It also highlights the best practices adopted by various cities and nations to effectively handle the health crisis, and makes recommendations to ensure effective delivery of health facilities and services to PwDs.

Challenges related to education faced by CwDs

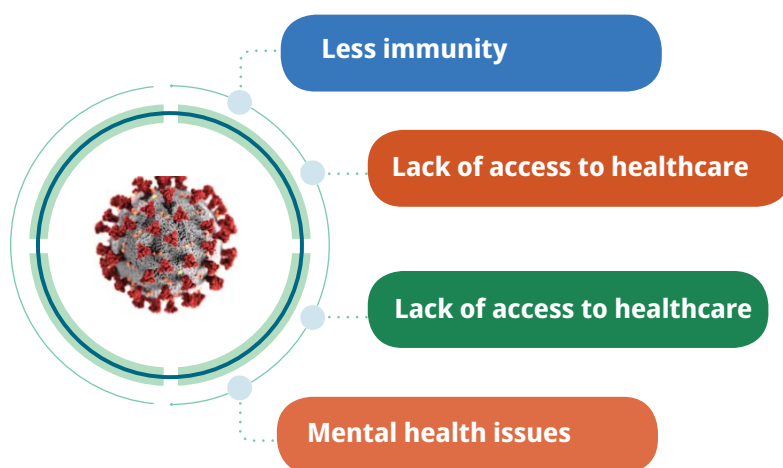
Article 25 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) enshrines the right to the highest attainable standard of health for PwDs and stresses the importance of health services' provision as close as possible to people's own communities. Despite being a population that is particularly at-risk to COVID-19, PwDs faced even greater inequalities in accessing healthcare during the pandemic due to inaccessible health information and environments as well as selective medical guidelines and protocols that may magnify the discrimination that PwDs face in healthcare provision.

Vietnam was one of the first countries in the world to sign UNCRPD. Therefore, to identify health and socioeconomic

challenges faced by PwDs and their families during COVID-19 and formulating recommendations for the government on COVID-19 disability-inclusive response and recovery, a rapid assessment was done.

The rapid assessment was carried out through a survey of PwDs. The results of the rapid assessment revealed that 82 per cent of the respondents were concerned about protecting their health during the COVID-19 pandemic; 70 per cent of the respondents found it challenging to access medical care, including check-ups, medicines, assistive devices, and rehabilitation services.³³

FIGURE 8: HEALTH IMPLICATIONS FOR PWDS DUE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC.



³³ Huong, D. (2020). UNDP Viet Nam Project, Rapid Assessment Of The Socio-Economic Impact Of Covid-19 On Persons With Disabilities In Vietnam. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/PWD%20Report_EN_FINAL.pdf

Best Practices

Most countries gradually adopted the accessibility measures recommended by international organizations in their epidemiological reports and in campaigns on the prevention of COVID-19. Civil society organizations (CSOs) played an important role in the adaptation and dissemination of these materials.

- Several cities (Barcelona, Gothenburg, Leipzig, Milan, and Vienna)³⁴ focused on removing barriers to treatment and testing by enhancing accessibility to testing facilities or providing special quarantine facilities. While many cities faced PPE shortages during the first wave, PPE purchasing logistics substantially improved before the second wave. Several cities introduced transparent face masks to make non-verbal communication easier for people with hearing impairments.
- Chile³⁵ defined protocols that prioritized access to intensive therapies and access to sanitary hotels (temporary residences) for people with COVID-19 without the possibility of isolation. In case of not having a caregiver, the person was provided a free caregiver to accompany her/him during quarantine.
- In Mexico³⁶ the government developed specific accessible communication guides for physical, hearing, intellectual, psychosocial, and visual disabilities.

- In Argentina³⁷ a new WhatsApp service of the National Disability Agency was created to answer questions and attend to emergencies in the framework of the health emergency. This service was complemented by a free sign language telephone number to answer questions about COVID-19.
- In the city of São Paulo (Brazil)³⁸ an application for cellphones and computers allowed access to public services and obtained information and answers about COVID-19 in sign language.
- In the United Arab Emirates³⁹ launched a national programme to test PwDs in their homes and as of mid-April it had conducted 650000 Covid-19 tests of PwDs.

Those with intellectual disability are 2.5 times more likely to contract COVID-19, about 2.7 times more likely to be hospitalized and 5.9 times more likely to die than the general population- Science Daily.⁴⁰

³⁴ Smirnova, M., and Palmora, N. (eds). A Decade Of Making Cities Inclusive, Available at: https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Euroities-report_A-new-decade-of-making-cities-disability-inclusive.pdf

³⁵ https://www.senadis.gob.cl/pag/585/1877/residencias_sanitarias

³⁶ <https://coronavirus.gob.mx/informacion-accesible/>

³⁷ <https://centroderelevo.gov.co/632/w3-channel.html>

³⁸ <https://centroderelevo.gov.co/632/w3-channel.html>

³⁹ United Nations Human Rights (2020). Covid-19 and The Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Disability/COVID-19_and_The_Rights_of_Persons_with_Disabilities.pdf

⁴⁰ Gleason, J., James, D., and Danella, M. (2021). After old age, intellectual disability is the greatest risk factor for death from COVID-19 Science Daily. Available at: <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2021/03/210305123809.htm>

- Some countries set up protocols that prioritized PwDs in the vaccination process, for example, in some areas of Brazil such as Campogrande, Natal, RioGrandedoNorte, and Piauí. In Chile, PwDs were vaccinated as a priority group in any health centre and regardless of age. In Montevideo (Uruguay), PwDs could request a free taxi to go to the health centre to receive the vaccine, thus avoiding exposure to COVID-19.⁴¹

Guidelines aimed at addressing children

- In Chile, a book targeted at deaf children on *How to fight COVID-19* was published. In the city of León (Mexico), the adaptation to braille of *Life in times of COVID-19, a guide for parents of children with disabilities*, an initiative of the UNESCO New Delhi Office, has tools to control stress, developed on topics such as cleaning, eating habits and health, exercise routine, learning new skills, and psychological, physiological, and emotional well-being.
- Regarding building community support networks in Santa Fe (Argentina) and La Paz (Bolivia) volunteer programmes were launched by the municipalities among neighbourhood networks for supporting older adults and people with disabilities in carrying out procedures, errands, and shopping.

- In the Philippines,⁴² the Commission on Human Rights published information to support health agencies tailor public messages for vulnerable groups of communities, including children and people with disabilities.
- In Canada⁴³ the COVID-19 Disability Advisory Group was established with the participation of PwDs and their representative organizations to advise the government on disability-specific issues, challenges, systemic gaps, strategies, and measures and steps to be taken.
- A survey of 1,700 children, parents, teachers, and caregivers was done in 104 countries on how the pandemic was affecting their lives, particularly their mental health and psychosocial well-being. The survey revealed that-
- Children were worried about being isolated from their family and friends and catching and even dying because of the virus.
- Parents were confused about how to address their children's fears, or how to explain extreme containment measures like social distancing.

Based on this survey, A storybook, '[MyHeroisYou](#),' was created for children that helped them better understand COVID-19 and how they can protect themselves⁴⁴.

- For adults not knowing if they will have basic supplies such as water or food; not being able to carry out daily activities such as working, not being able to visit sick relatives, thinking that

⁴¹ City hall will continue vaccinating people with disabilities and comorbidities on Monday. Available at: <https://montevideo.gub.uy/noticias/sociedad/una-nuevainiciativa-taxi-abc-gratuito>

⁴² United Nations Human Rights (2020). Covid-19 and The Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Disability/COVID-19_and_The_Rights_of_Persons_with_Disabilities.pdf

⁴³ United Nations Human Rights (2020). Covid-19 and The Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Disability/COVID-19_and_The_Rights_of_Persons_with_Disabilities.pdf

⁴⁴ My Hero is You. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/my-hero-you>

if they get sick, not having the option of meeting family and friends led to loneliness due to social isolation. “The advantage of this crisis is that it has created more awareness around the issue of social isolation,” says Corinne Letuppe, Coordinator of the Anti-Loneliness plan in Pau, France.⁴⁵

He added, “We did small interventions in the urban space to create friendly spaces that encourage the exchange between inhabitants.” Letuppe called these ‘the daily small investments’, an action included in the anti-loneliness plan. The ‘small investments’ included the planning of small squares, the creation of soft mobility infrastructure and playgrounds. The team of volunteers in Pau was quick to adapt to the COVID-19 challenge and they volunteered towards grocery shopping help, creating a buddy system, as well as manning a phone line support for persons who were confined in isolation.

Restrictions on movement and closure of schools have had a severe impact on children’s daily routines, their social interactions, and ultimately on their mental well-being across the Middle East and North Africa – Aswat.⁴⁶

Indian perspective on health issues during the pandemic

India, a country with the second highest COVID-19 caseload in the world, is characterized by a highly stratified society. There is diversity in terms of level of literacy and available healthcare in rural and urban areas. Often, women’s needs become of secondary importance

and essential resources for sexual and reproductive healthcare are diverted to emergency responses. Some Indian states and NGOs joined hands to provide services to PwDs during the pandemic:⁴⁷

- A doorstep medical service such as fixing /changing catheters was enabled by a southern state of Tamil Nadu’s Disability Commissioner. Doorstep personal physical therapy was also enabled. The Institute of Human Behaviour & Allied Sciences (IHBAS) ensured round the clock emergency services for psychiatry and neurology.
- Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) Regional Centre, Guwahati, a north-eastern state in India, offered online counseling services. The Commissioner for Welfare of the Differently-Abled in Chennai instructed the Tamil Nadu State Physiotherapy Council to provide e-physiotherapy sessions for disabled people in the state.
- Doctors at the Indian Society of Rare Diseases provided help to patients with neuromuscular disorders through tele-medications. A similar approach was followed by other doctors in the leprosy colonies as well.

Mental health effects of the COVID-19 crisis are significant with millions of people in India and globally experiencing increased distress, anxiety, hopelessness and depression. One of the first studies using primary data that qualitatively examined mental distress and coping responses to COVID-19 in South Asia with an intersectional lens found that the impact of COVID-19 on mental distress aligns with quantitative studies that also show that there are far-reaching mental

⁴⁵ Dragonetti, W. (2021). Lonely no more. Available at: <https://eurocities.eu/stories/lonely-no-more/>

⁴⁶ Awsat, A. (2020). COVID-19, An opportunity to bridge the digital gap and reform education systems in the region. UNICEF MENA (Middle East and North Africa 2020). Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/mena/stories/covid-19-opportunity-bridge-digital-gap-and-reform-education-systems-region>

⁴⁷ Locked down and left behind. Available at: https://www.ncpedp.org/sites/all/themes/marinelli/documents/Report-locked_down_left_behind.pdf

health consequences such as reduced sense of control, social isolation, increased social 'othering' and discrimination.⁴⁸

However, as nerve-wracking as the phase was due to the unforeseen lack of physical proximity, certain organizations were able to manage the breakdowns, while also addressing the additional burden that parenting placed on individuals with disabled children.

Experience of Parineeta, mother of an autistic child⁴⁹

Parineeta is the mother of a child with autism. She says, "My son Rishav is aware of his disability and he is learning to accept the way he is. However, the lockdown was really difficult for him. He was unable to go out anywhere. He lived an isolated life. He missed his friends. How long could he keep colouring or reading or playing with his toys? He was mentally disturbed. he didn't even talk to us. We consulted a psychologist for support. We were terrified that if the lockdown went on, it would lead to more psychological issues."

- An organization in Bengaluru, Karnataka envisioned that thousands of school-going children stuck at home for an indefinite and unforeseeable future would start feeling anxious and restless. This would in turn affect their mental health. They used arts-based education to provide children, young people, and even parents and teachers with ways to cope during the pandemic. Art kits were created for learners aged 4 to 10 years. To date over 34,000 children in cities like Chennai, Coimbatore, and Delhi have received the kits in a bag containing stationery, art material, a set of plain notebooks, and an Art for Well-being workbooks. In partnership with the state government they designed a programme using the country's Voice Response System, which allowed learners to ring a toll-free number that automatically returned their calls. On answering the phone, learners listened to a new recorded story lasting up to six minutes each day for over 30 days. The narrative revolved around characters of the same age, which experienced similar challenges. Through the art of storytelling, young listeners picked up ideas and strategies on how to cope with mental health issues and completed the accompanying exercises after each daily recording.⁵⁰
- Another organization in Bengaluru, worked with parents of children with special needs. The view of the founder is, "I believe that if you work with parents first and ensure that their anxieties aren't passed onto the children, 50 percent of the battles are already won. Therefore, we've started a study circle where we meet parents once a week, pick a topic and conduct activities around it so that they feel that someone is investing in their psychosocial well-being too." She noted that the lockdown allowed some parents to discuss important issues like sexuality education and body

⁴⁸ Mathias, K., Rawat, M., Philip, S., and Grills, N. (2020). We've got through hard times before: acute mental distress and coping among disadvantaged groups during COVID-19 lockdown in North India - a qualitative study. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 19:224. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-020-01345-7>

⁴⁹ Arts and music the path to mental well being of children (2021). Available at: <https://www.ourbetterworld.org/story/nalandaway-follow-up2>

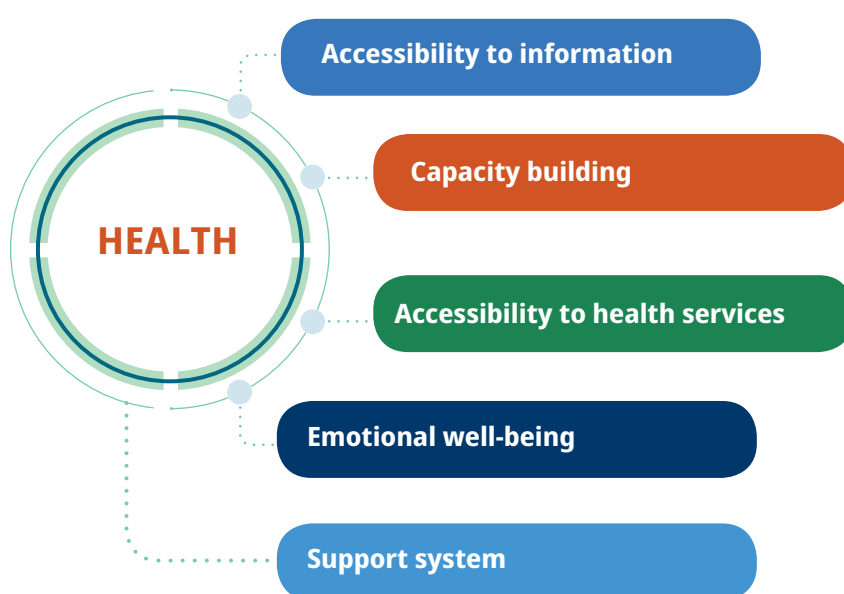
⁵⁰ Arts and music the path to mental well being of children (2021). Available at: <https://www.ourbetterworld.org/story/nalandaway-follow-up2>

awareness with their children.⁵¹

- Other innovative forms of 'parent-empowering' programmes were in operation in various organizations. These include yoga and wellness programmes as well as modules where

parents were able to participate in tasks with their children. Volunteers did daily telephonic check-ins to give social support to the parents. Such practices and conversations inculcated the confidence in parents to ably manage their children during a meltdown.⁵²

FIGURE 9: KEY AREAS THAT EMERGED AFTER THE ANALYSIS OF HEALTH PRACTICES FOLLOWED IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES



⁵¹ <https://snehadharafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/Reports/Annual-Report-2020-2021.pdf>

⁵² Mirra Educate empower and embrace, NGO. Available at: <http://mirract.com/about/>

Recommendations based on Policies and Practices

I. Accessibility to information and services

- a. Ensuring health information in multiple accessible formats for PwDs.
- b. Providing transparent face masks to aid communication for people with hearing impairments.
- c. Conducting access audits of the sites where vaccinations are delivered and provide guidance and assistance to those who need it.

II. Building community support

- a. Undertaking awareness raising programmes on disability rights for including the right to access information and informed consent to medical treatment and vaccination.
- b. Providing online counselling to de-stress PwDs as well as their families to cope with the impact of the pandemic.

III. Disability specific policies and monitoring mechanisms

- a. Prioritizing support for PwDs in urgent need of medical care and services, providing tele-health services where appropriate for facilitating home health monitoring.
- b. Ensuring that PwDs get priority access to free or low-cost vaccinations; including personal assistants, family caregivers, and persons working in disability-related services.
- c. Making provisions for special quarantine facilities and free or low-cost accessible transportation for PwDs where necessary.

IV. Capacity building of PwDs

- a. Developing programmes for educating PwDs about their right to health services without discrimination and prejudice.

Impact of COVID-19 on the Employment of PwDs

This section discusses the financial struggles and challenges faced by PwDs in their current employment status as well as employability in general due to the pandemic. It also highlights the best practices adopted by various cities and nations to secure employment for PwDs and ensuring safe working spaces for them. This section also makes some recommendations to ensure safe and secure working spaces for PwDs.

Financial struggles experienced by PwDs

The pandemic and the resulting economic shock increased PwDs' vulnerabilities to inequalities. PwDs are at a heightened risk of poverty due to the pandemic because they are more likely to be unemployed due to persistent discrimination and stigma, have low access to social protection and financial support, and had to deal with disruption of social support and rehabilitation services during the pandemic.

The International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities (ICCAR), was launched by UNESCO in March 2004.

Since its inception, and its revitalization in 2014, ICCAR has grown to become an active global front against racism and discrimination with over 500 members across the globe. Member cities engage in various initiatives ranging from policy making, capacity-building to awareness-raising activities to advance their agenda to foster inclusive urban development. During the pandemic, a number of ICCAR cities took steps to ensure the promotion of disability rights, ensuring that PwDs had access to services, social development, and active participation in the community.⁵³

To collect evidence from cities on the implementation of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, 22 cities were surveyed across 14 EU Member States. The survey considered the COVID-19 pandemic, the additional challenges faced by PwDs due to the health crisis, and efforts made by cities to address these challenges.

Since March 2020, one in 5 workers with disabilities have been dismissed from employment, compared to one in 7 in the general population, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics.⁵⁴

⁵³ Smirnova, M. and Palmora, N. (eds). A Decade Of Making Cities Inclusive, Available at: https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Eurocities-report_A-new-decade-of-making-cities-disability-inclusive.pdf

⁵⁴ Disability inclusion in company responses to COVID-19: Results of a survey among National Business and Disability Networks and their members. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/disability-and-work/WCMS_750505/lang-en/index.htm

Employers can help improve the hire and retention rate among PwDs by:

- Using inclusive images and text on their career portals, in their job descriptions, and on their social media sites.
- Taking the Disability Equality Index and remedying any gaps.
- Ensuring that their accommodation process is well-communicated and efficient.
- Using digital meeting platforms with disability-related capabilities

– Deborah Dagit.⁵⁵

A survey by the National Organization on Disability (NOD)⁵⁶ of 200 organizations that collectively employ 8.7 million people found:

- The road back to employment may be difficult for laid-off workers with disabilities as many companies lack disability-inclusive cultures.
- Many employers did not have adequate accommodation processes.
- Few hiring managers received disability training to effectively on-board new employees.
- Many platforms used for virtual meetings lacked access solutions. They may not have reliable captioning, for example, or the ability to "pin" a sign

language interpreter on the screen.

Neil Romano,⁵⁷ president of the National Council on Disability in Washington said, "People with disabilities face barriers as they search for work. Employers should value a truly diverse workforce, harnessing the potential of people with disabilities for the good of the individual, the country and the business."

The transition to new ways of working in the context of a global pandemic with far-reaching societal and economic implications presents both challenges and opportunities for promoting the inclusion of persons with special abilities. For some employees with special abilities, avoiding commuting to work everyday can open up a range of jobs they can now perform

⁵⁵ Smith, A. (2020). A Million People with Disabilities Have Lost Jobs During the Pandemic. Available at <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/legal-and-compliance/employment-law/pages/coronavirus-unemployment-people-with-disabilities.aspx>

⁵⁶ Disability inclusion in company responses to COVID-19: Results of a survey among National Business and Disability Networks and their members. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/disability-and-work/WCMS_750505/lang-en/index.htm

⁵⁷ Smith, A. (2020) A Million People with Disabilities Have Lost Jobs During the Pandemic. Available at: <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/legal-and-compliance/employment-law/pages/coronavirus-unemployment-people-with-disabilities.aspx>

from home. Having a setup conducive to their special needs at home also encourages them to get more meaningful work that they can perform productively.

Best Practices

Several countries and cities came up with inclusive policies that helped in both hiring and retaining PwDs. Some of these best practices are:⁵⁸

- Berlin's annual €20000 Integration Prize awarded by the municipality to companies who demonstrated outstanding efforts towards long-term employment of PwDs and the creation of accessible jobs. The prize recognizes companies for their efforts and also sheds light on the need for private businesses to work on inclusion.
- Malmö's 'MakeitWork' project started in April 2020 for a period of two years, targeting around 40 job seekers with disabilities under the age of 30 years. The project involved study visits, information campaigns for employers about how to support PwDs in the workplace, work placements, and individualized long-term support to ensure continuity in the labour market.
- Beyond economic aid, cities also worked with employers to promote the incorporation of PwDs into their staff. Barcelona, led a network of 11 labour inclusion services, which enabled them to share best practices and engage in collective action to foster employment opportunities for PwDs.
- Cities increasingly made use of digital technologies to promote the inclusion of PwDs. Two-third of surveyed cities did so to boost the employability of PwDs. This was achieved through the digital matching of employers and job-seekers (Hamburg), the provision of online training and workshops (Utrecht), and the use of recruitment tools adapted to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) (Malmö). Most of the surveyed cities (18 cities, 81.2 per cent) ensured a supportive work environment and put in place reasonable accommodations for workers with disabilities, be it in terms of infrastructure and material, or working hours and workloads. Stockholm provided size-adaptable chairs, computer glasses, ramps, and door openers and offered the possibility of adapted working hours. Bologna trained managers and officers in municipal posts to raise awareness about disabilities in the workplace and made them key partners in the inclusion of employees with disabilities.
- Berlin relaunched its online career portal putting the focus on its responsibility to ensure equal employment opportunities for all. The administration sought to hire and train more PwDs, especially for traineeship. The portal offered information about Berlin's role as an employer both in easy-read mode and with sign language videos. Other cities focused on expanding opportunities for young PwDs. Utrecht came up with a targeted internship programme for young PwDs to work within municipal departments and Toulouse established partnerships with universities and other educational centres to hire PwDs for internships and apprenticeships.
- New benefits were created aimed at PwDs to mitigate the COVID-19 emergency. For example, extraordinary bonus was given to people who received non-contributory

⁵⁸ Smirnova, M. and Palmora, N. (eds). A Decade Of Making Cities Inclusive, Available at: https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Eurocities-report_A-new-decade-of-making-cities-disability-inclusive.pdf

pensions in Argentina.⁵⁹

- In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Bulgaria, Malta, and Lithuania increased funding for their social protection systems to expand social support services and cover more beneficiaries, including PwDs.⁶⁰
- In Argentina and Peru, persons receiving disability benefits got an additional amount because of the COVID-19 crisis. France announced a similar measure favouring beneficiaries of the disability allowance and Tunisia's emergency plan included cash transfers for low income households, PwDs, and homeless people.⁶¹
- In Uruguay an NGO that provides supported employment services, organized online exchange meetings between companies to share good practices with them.
- The United States of America came up with established tax relief programmes to contribute to alleviate the financial situation of PwDs.⁶²
- The Bangladesh, Business and Disability Network facilitated job matching services during the pandemic for PwDs who had lost their jobs or were looking for their first job, and the Philippine Business and Disability Network launched a reskilling initiative to help workers with disabilities acquire skills for post-crisis work.⁶³
- Canadian unions coordinated with the Disabled Women's Network Canada (DAWN)⁶⁴ which developed case studies of exemplary employers from a variety of sectors, whose good practices could be shared with other businesses. They focused on holding employers accountable to enable them to continue hiring, retaining, and promoting PwDs in their businesses, including a fund for supporting small and medium sized businesses so that they did not suffer undue hardships in accommodating PwDs.
- The International Labour Organization (ILO) Global Business and National Business and Disability Networks (NBDN), conducted two surveys⁶⁵. The results are indicative of the challenges that networks and companies faced in making their responses to COVID-19 disability inclusive, and they point to good practices that can be replicated anywhere:
 - To provide tele-work
 - Flexible working hours
 - Paid leave
- Forty seven per cent of the networks indicated that they had provided other

⁵⁹ <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/noticias/bono-extraordinario-para-las-personas-con-discapacidad-que-cobran-pensiones-no>

⁶⁰ United Nations Human Rights (2020). Covid-19 and The Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Disability/COVID-19_and_The_Rights_of_Persons_with_Disabilities.pdf

⁶¹ United Nations Human Rights (2020). Covid-19 and The Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Disability/COVID-19_and_The_Rights_of_Persons_with_Disabilities.pdf

⁶² United Nations Human Rights (2020). Covid-19 and The Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Disability/COVID-19_and_The_Rights_of_Persons_with_Disabilities.pdf

⁶³ United Nations Human Rights (2020). Covid-19 and The Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Disability/COVID-19_and_The_Rights_of_Persons_with_Disabilities.pdf

⁶⁴ More than a footnote, A research Report on Women and Girls with Disability in Canada. Available at: <https://www.dawnCanada.net/projects/beyond%20uncrpd/>

⁶⁵ Smith, A. (2020). A Million People with Disabilities Have Lost Jobs During the Pandemic. Available at: <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/legal-and-compliance/employment-law/pages/coronavirus-unemployment-people-with-disabilities.aspx>

types of support to their company members. This included:

- o Developing a COVID-19 toolkit and online platform to share best practices regarding employees and customers with disabilities (United Kingdom, NBDN).
- o Linking company members with PwDs (Bangladesh, NBDN).
- o Drafting manuals and developing videos (Mexico, NBDN).
- Eleven out of 19 NBDNs responded that they supported training and employment of PwDs and 11 also said they carried out advocacy and awareness raising campaigns. Examples of these initiatives include:
 - o The Philippine Business and Disability Network launched an initiative to help PwDs acquire skills for the 'New Normal' in work.
 - o The Bangladesh Business and Disability Network switched its job matching services to an online platform.

"The pandemic has also given us a set of resources, brought new people together, increasing skill sets and competencies. All of which we may not have achieved this soon if not for the pandemic,"

- Sriram⁶⁶

Indian perspective on health issues during the pandemic

In India, an emergency lockdown brought life to a screeching halt for many, especially migrants, daily wage earners, and the poor. Most PwDs are engaged in the unorganized sector.

- The central government announced that it will provide three months' pension in advance to PwDs. The Delhi government doubled the pension for widows, PwDs, and the elderly in March 2020. Similarly, Kerala, Maharashtra, and Jammu and Kashmir gave pensions in advance to PwDs. Kerala also ensured that CwDs received Rs 5,000 as ex gratia payment. Kerala maintained a list of PwDs for advance pension payments.⁶⁷
- WeAreYourVoice⁶⁸ addressed the demand and supply side challenges simultaneously. It placed district level officers who worked with Disabled People's Organizations (DPOs), individuals, and government bodies in their area to populate data on PwDs, assess their skills and aspirations, and specific disability-accommodation needs. Almost 2,000 PwDs were profiled across 200 blocks in Tamil Nadu in less than three months. The organization simultaneously worked on the demand side by liaising with micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and government bodies/projects to understand their manpower needs and accordingly started one to one mapping. WeAreYourVoice has profiled about 4,500 PwDs in rural areas and placed more than 700 in roles close to their homes. It also worked with the government to

⁶⁶ Comprehensive Disability Inclusive Guidelines (2020). Available at: <http://disabilityaffairs.gov.in/content/page/whats-new.php>

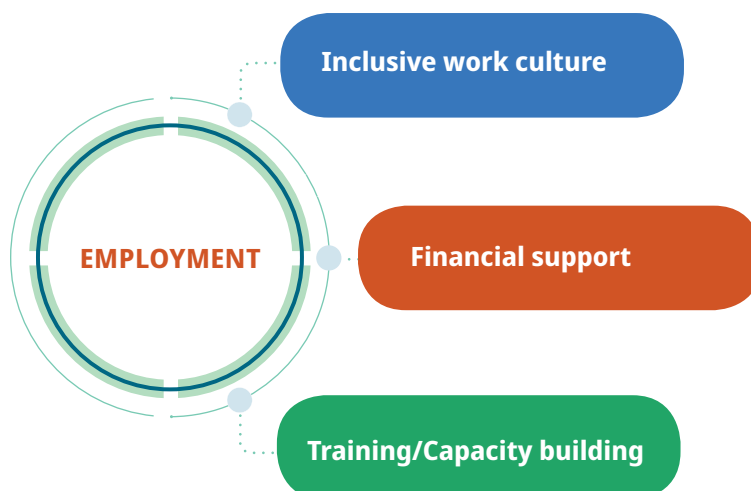
⁶⁷ Locked down and left behind. Available at: https://www.ncpedp.org/sites/all/themes/marinelli/documents/Report-locked_down_left_behind.pdf

⁶⁸ How a Chennai initiative is helping differently-abled people acquire economic independence? Available at: <https://chennai.citizenmatters.in/we-are-your-voicejob-fair-for-persons-with-disability-kasim-basith-3377>

see if people with special skills like masons, electricians, plumbers, cooks, and housekeeping staff (who were employed in hotels/retail stores in cities) could be given the initial head-start to become micro-entrepreneurs. WeAreYourVoice is confident of immense possibilities that exist ranging from augmenting health and sanitization in infrastructure in rural areas to giving boost to eco-tourism.

- Many companies adopted innovative ways to address the challenges in retaining PwDs in their companies.

FIGURE 10: KEY AREAS THAT EMERGED AFTER THE ANALYSIS OF EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES FOLLOWED IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES



Managing Director of a company said:

"For us, technology has been a significant enabler. We have a 'Disability Adjustment Request' platform that acts as a one-stop-shop for all reasonable accommodation requirements of our people including assistive technologies and ergonomic adjustments while offering a very personalized experience. We have an in-house platform called Dhvani that enables voice to text and text to voice conversion and supports communication for people who have speech, hearing, and language disabilities. Dhvani is integrated with all our virtual collaboration platforms."⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Sharma, A. (2020) How COVID-19 has fared for persons with disabilities. Available at: <https://www.peoplemattersglobal.com/article/diversity/how-covid-19-has-fared-forpersons-with-disabilities-international-day-of-disabled-persons-2020-27781o>

Recommendations based on Policies and Practices

I. Accessibility to information and services

- a. Providing reasonable accommodation and facilities to PwDs to work from home like use of assistive technology.
- b. Ensuring availability of free or subsidized transport to travel to place of work if necessary.
- c. Promoting safe rules of conduct at work particularly for women with disabilities.
- d. Ensuring hygiene and safety measures, including social distancing at the workplace.

II. Building community support

- a. Promoting partnerships between governments, not-for-profit organizations, and corporates to enhance access to jobs.
- b. Sensitizing organizations about PwDs' abilities using multimedia to generate more jobs.

III. Disability specific policy and monitoring mechanisms

- a. Providing disaggregated data related to type of disability and functionality of PwDs to map jobs.
- b. Ensuring subsidized company medical services and health insurance for employees with disabilities.
- c. Ensuring adequate social security systems for PwDs particularly for the aged and institutionalized.

IV. Capacity building of CwDs

- a. Creating opportunities for upskilling PwDs

Impact of COVID-19 on Independent and Safe Living of PwDs

This section highlights the challenges faced by PwDs in leading independent and safe lives during the pandemic. It also highlights the best practices and approaches adopted by various cities and nations to ensure safety and security of individuals with disabilities. Lastly, it makes recommendations on how secure habitable spaces can be created for PwDs.

Challenges related to independent living faced by PwDs

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted 'normal' as we knew it. As humankind is trying to navigate through the chaos and confusion brought upon by the microscopic virus, the situation was particularly bleak for PwDs.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, Catalina Devandas,⁷⁰ said: "Little has been done to

A blind man said,

"One day I needed to cross the road on my way to the bank. I was surprised that though I asked for help, no one came forward. My city was not like this before the lockdown. Then I realized everyone wanted to maintain physical distance."

Another person wrote on social media,

"I am hard of hearing and do not follow sign language. I understand by following the lip movement of other people when they speak. Everyone is wearing masks these days. A few disability groups are selling transparent masks but most people are not using them. I am unable to even go and buy medicines for myself as I cannot communicate with people."

⁷⁰ COVID-19: Who is protecting the people with disabilities? – UN rights expert. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25725&LangID=E>

provide people with disabilities with the guidance and support needed to protect them during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, even though many of them are part of the high-risk group.”

Some PwDs were concerned about the public information services that were drafted keeping in mind only non-disabled people. There was concern among deaf-blind people as to how they would communicate with the outside world during the pandemic and abide by requirements of physical distancing and avoiding touching. Accounts of several people from the community reaffirmed how flawed design remained entrenched in our social and infrastructural fabric. The fear of the virus made people from the community nearly invisible. Unlike most of the non-disabled population, PwDs needed to put in a great deal of effort to plan simple, daily errands.

- There is an international monitoring initiative entitled “COVID-19 Disability Rights Monitor” (DRM)⁷¹ to conduct rapid independent monitoring of state measures for PwDs. The COVID-19 DRM survey suggested that governments around the world failed to protect the right to life of PwDs in institutions during the pandemic. PwDs from around the world reported that they lost their independence during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some PwDs said that they were forced to rely on their family members, charities, or NGOs for survival.
- Almost one-third of the respondents in 81 countries said that PwDs in their countries could not access food and adequate nutrition during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Ten countries with the highest percentage of respondents reported

no access to food- Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya, Bangladesh, India, Colombia, Côte d’Ivoire, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Peru.

- The COVID-19 Disability Rights Monitor Survey received 370 written testimonials from all continents. The testimonies show an alarming global phenomenon of police harassment, torture and murder of PwDs and their family members. The findings indicate that PwDs were particularly vulnerable to various forms of exploitation, violence and abuse in countries with strict curfew and strong police or military presence. In extreme cases, breaking curfew rules was a matter of life or death.

A respondent from a Ugandan organization of PwDs said: “I know two PwDs who have been shot at because they were outside at curfew time. These were deaf people and didn’t know what was happening.”

- The survey findings suggest that women and girls with disabilities were disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and experienced specific rights violations due to the interaction of discrimination on the basis of disability and gender identity, as well as age.
- The survey received several testimonies of grave human rights abuses which included multiple forms of assault and violence. There were reports of sexual assault, domestic violence, and police brutality against women and girls with disabilities. Respondents feared that the actions taken by governments, which made

⁷¹ Disability rights during the pandemic A global report on findings of the COVID-19 Disability Rights Monitor. Available at: https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/disability_rights_during_the_pandemic_report_web_pdf_1.pdf

women and girls with disabilities more isolated than ever before, would increase the risk of sexual violence. The respondents were extremely critical of the absence of government interventions and support for women and girls who had experienced sexual assaults.

- A representative of an organization of persons with disabilities in Nepal said: "Recently, a girl child aged 10 years who lives with intellectual disability has been raped. Hence the government should take measures."
- Institutionalized women, older women, and women caregivers were impacted the most because of the pandemic. While the respondents acknowledged that violence against women and girls with disabilities has always been a problem, there was a greater risk of falling victim to domestic violence due to heightened tensions at home. The survivors of violence may have faced additional obstacles to flee violent situations or to access protective orders or essential services that can save lives due to lockdowns or quarantine.⁷²
- Widespread school closures also increased risks of child marriage, as research by Human Rights Watch in Malawi, South Sudan, and Tanzania shows a strong connection between girls leaving or being out of school and them being forced into marriage.⁷³
- According to WHO, sexual and gender-based violence increases during a crisis due to breakdown of the law. Thus, victims often do not receive adequate support and the perpetrators

do not get the punishment they deserve. For many women, the fear of contracting the Coronavirus stopped them from seeking medical care after experiencing physical abuse.⁷⁴

"Despite 25 years passing since the Disability Discrimination Act, disabled people's needs still aren't prioritized. We must see change - starting with all COVID guidance including specific information to meet the needs of PwDs"

- person with a disability.

"All I want is to be able to access supermarket delivery as a priority customer."

Supermarkets are not doing enough to prioritize support to those in isolation at home"

- A blind respondent

- As more women were in informal jobs they got laid off during lockdowns leading to them experiencing a greater impact as they became economically dependent on their male counterparts. Economic insecurity has been found to be linked to adopting poor coping strategies that are inclusive of substance abuse and alcoholism. Economic strain, substance abuse, and isolation all tend to increase the risk of domestic violence. Several media reports indicated a surge in cases of domestic violence in various countries

⁷² COVID-19 and violence against women. Available at: <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331699/WHO-SRH-20.04-eng.pdf>

⁷³ Impact of COVID-19 on Children's Education in Africa. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2020/08/Discussion%20Paper%20-%20Covid%20for%20ACERWC.pdf

⁷⁴ WHO Guidance for Managing Ethical Issues In Infectious Disease Outbreaks (2016). Available at: <http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/250580/9789241549837-%20eng.pdf;jsessionid=1BF146EA85C7D046EDC990BA933DA81F?sequence=1>

like domestic abuse rates increasing by 5 per cent in Australia during the pandemic. China witnessed a three-fold increase in cases of domestic violence after it imposed quarantine. Different states in the United States also reported an increase of about 21–35 per cent in domestic violence. Even in UK there was an increase in the number of domestic homicides.⁷⁵

Best Practices

UNESCO, together with its partner UN agencies, continued to build bridges between key national stakeholders– the government, civil society, the research community, and media for the fulfilment of fundamental rights, and the realization of inclusive social development goals in many countries. In Indonesia, UNESCO supported the Network of Mayors for Inclusive Cities and its member cities to design and implement innovative policies that promoted social inclusion of PwDs. UNESCO and Indonesian NGO Kota Kita joined hands as part of a participatory initiative to build a profile of Banjarmasin as an inclusive city. City surveys and interviews surveying 3,897 PwDs and investigating the experiences of PwDs living in Banjarmasin showed prevailing prejudices that excluded these people from society, including the view that disability brought shame to the family, or worse: a curse, sorcery, and punishment by god. As a result, PwDs often experienced low self-esteem and were excluded from public services, including education, employment, and healthcare.⁷⁶

UNESCO and Kota Kita progressed

towards making Banjarmasin a disability inclusive city to ensure the fulfilment of disability rights. “Guiding blocks and ramps in public places have made life easier,” said Fitriah, a housewife with disabilities in Banjarmasin. ‘Paddle together towards Banjarmasin Inclusive City’ is a documentary which shares many challenges as well as good initiatives taken by UNESCO and Kota Kita.⁷⁷

‘SoloCity: A Disability-Inclusive City Profile’ is another initiative taken by the UNESCO Office in Jakarta.⁷⁸ One of the city’s most significant infrastructure improvements is the citywalk alongside Slamet Riyadi Street. Strict regulations and penalty systems were developed to curb informal vendors and vehicles parked in the vicinity, and guiding blocks were installed to assist visually impaired people. To provide accessibility to PwDs bus shelters were installed throughout the city, accommodating the principle of the universal design. These initiatives were aimed at demonstrating the power of data and evidence in designing effective disability inclusive policies. This had immense significance during the pandemic in all areas of political, economic, and social life in ensuring access to PwDs so they could live with dignity and achieve their full potential.

Best practices from cities around the world to fight all types of inequalities at the local level include:⁷⁹

- PwDs experienced numerous barriers in using transportation to access essential goods, like fresh food and services, like medical care, that are necessary for maintaining health.

⁷⁵ Mittal, S. and Singh, T. (2021). Gender-Based Violence During COVID-19 Pandemic: A MiniReview. *Frontiers in Global Women's Health*. Available at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fgwh.2020.00004/full>

⁷⁶ Banjarmasin City: A Disability-Inclusive City Profile. Available at: https://en.unesco.org/inclusivepolicylab/sites/default/files/clearinghouse/document/2019/10/A_Disability-InclusiveCityProfile_0.pdf

⁷⁷ Paddle together towards Banjarmasin Inclusive City (22 October 2019). Available at: <https://en.unesco.org/inclusivepolicylab/learning/paddle-together-towards-banjarmasin-inclusive-city>

⁷⁸ Solo City: A Disability-Inclusive City Profile. Available at: <https://en.unesco.org/inclusivepolicylab/e-teams/inclusive-policy-persons-disabilities-indonesia/documents/solo-city-disability-inclusive>

⁷⁹ Smirnova, M. and Palmora, N. (eds). *A Decade Of Making Cities Inclusive*, Available at: <https://eurocities.eu/>

Limited transportation also puts PwDs at increased risk of social exclusion. Berlin introduced a multi-modal pedestrian routing, based on the results of the “m4guide–barrier-free navigation in Berlin” research project funded by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi). Aimed at the needs of people with motor function and sensory impairments, the routing system will be integrated in the travel info app of the Berlin-Brandenburg transport association and transport companies. This system will enable passengers with mobility limitations to navigate independently through voice output via TalkBack and VoiceOver.

- Milan nearly completed the installation of elevators in underground stops and railway stations to make the entire network totally accessible.
- Barcelona provided specific grants to individuals to improve their dwellings with new technologies that facilitate living for PwDs. Financial support was also provided for housing and building adaptations
- Tallinn, for instance, reimbursed part of the costs incurred on housing adaptations if, as a result, a person’s ability to live independently and perform daily tasks improved, or his/her need for assistance in movement, hygiene operations, cooking, ensuring safety, and communication were considerably reduced.
- Bologna city provided financial support to PwDs. The city provided financial assistance through:

- Subsidizing discounts for public transport and leisure events. Financial support for carers in their homes.
 - Support for purchasing equipment that facilitated living at home.
 - Financial aid to cover home-to-work commutes.
 - Financial aid to businesses seeking to eliminate architectural obstacles for their employees.
 - Contributions for the purchase or adaptation of private vehicles and support for telephone and internet services.
- In response to COVID-19, differently abled persons in Indonesia⁸⁰ challenged their role as mere objects or targets of government programmes and demanded an active involvement in emergency response. Disabled activists took their own initiative to help the government mitigate both short and long-term impacts of the pandemic on PwDs.
 - Realizing the importance of capacity building of PwDs, the Commonwealth Disabled People’s Forum lobbied for disabled people during the COVID-19 pandemic. A course of 14 modules was delivered online every week to educate and empower PwDs about their rights.⁸¹
 - In Malta⁸² the Ministry of Social Policy created a helpline for older and vulnerable people to provide them support regarding food and medicines that was coordinated and delivered to their homes.

wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Euroities-report_A-new-decade-of-making-cities-disability-inclusive.pdf

⁸⁰ Indonesian disability activism amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Available at: <https://www.newmandala.org/indonesian-disability-activism-amidst-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

⁸¹ Free On-line Disability Equality Capacity-building Course. Commonwealth Disabled People’s Forum. Available at: <https://commonwealthdpf.org/free-on-line-disability-equality-capacity-building-course/#:~:text=With%2080%20organisations%20run%20and,people%20during%20Covid%2D19%20pandemic>

⁸² Disability rights during the pandemic A global report on findings of the COVID-19 Disability Rights Monitor. Available at: https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/disability_rights_during_the_pandemic_report_web_pdf_1.pdf

Aira⁸³- An initiative by a leading coffee shop in the US to help persons with visual impairments

For giving the same experience to people with visual impairments as their sighted friends, a leading coffee company announced that it was going to offer its customers in the United States free access to Aira, a service that lets visually impaired and blind users gain access to a real person who helps them understand their surroundings inside the outlet. This can be as simple as reading a sign that informs users about COVID-19 norms at the outlet, or whether there were too many people around them. Visually impaired users might definitely feel more comfortable with extra reassurance that they were standing on the right floor markers and knowing how far others were from them.

Digital Life

In relation to digital life, support systems for online inclusion were established in Santa Fe (Argentina) through assistance provided by professionals for the digital management of procedures such as the disability certificates, national pensions, EFI assistance (Emergency Family Income) and the management of doctors' shifts.

several organizations from different countries (Guatemala, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic), promoted the exchange of accessible literature between readers and authors in the framework of the Marrakesh Treaty. In Argentina, the 'Stories on the Net' was done jointly by several organizations, which disseminated stories and poetry through audio recordings on WhatsApp.

As consumers in community life

In Santa Fe (Argentina), menus were created in QR with an accessible format for people with visual disabilities and sign language speakers. This practice was carried out in coordination with catering and hospitality businesses.

A new website was created to host surveys at www.covid-drm.org. During the pandemic plans were also afoot to have a dashboard to make the data collected publicly available. Surveys were made available in 15 languages initially. It was expected that the information collected will identify common issues facing PwDs worldwide, provide valuable information to inform policy measures at national and global levels, and will highlight promising practices which can strengthen the protection of disability rights during crises⁸⁴.

Access to culture and leisure activities

- The initiative 'Circle of virtual letters readers' in coordination between

⁸³ HiTech (2021). Starbucks app improves accessibility features for visually impaired users: Report. Available at: <https://tech.hindustantimes.com/tech/news/starbucksimproves-accessibility-%20for-visually-impaired-users-report-71615878723972.html>

⁸⁴ Disability Rights During the Coronavirus Pandemic: Launch of the COVID-19 Disability Rights

According to a researcher, using artificial intelligence with the help of the new [LineChaser application](#), visually impaired people could maintain a safe distance from others around them as spotted by [SlashGear](#). Instead of relying on a single camera, the app uses data from two sensors to help users measure the distance between themselves and person in front of them⁸⁵.

To combat the issue of gender-based violence, some countries tried to adapt to quarantine because of COVID-19 by implementing several practices to reduce gender-based violence:⁸⁶

- Paris setup warning systems at groceries and pharmacies to enable victims of gender and family violence to alert the authorities. They could also alert the staff about the required help by using code words that were introduced.
- The Domestic Violence Resource Centre in Victoria, Australia issued specific guidance for family and friends to support those in family violence situations. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UN Women published guidelines that can be used by various governments to include gender considerations in their responses.
- National Domestic Violence Hotline, USA offered services via online texting chat so that victims of domestic violence could seek help.
- In Beijing, China, a judicial court used cloud-based platforms and online court hearings to deal with cases of gender-based violence during the pandemic.

- In El Salvador, a group of women with visual disabilities launched the activity 'Your voice has power' under the project 'Blind Women Defending Earned Rights in a New Reality', which consisted of a telephone service line aimed at other women with disabilities and disabled victims of violence for addressing issues related to their economic, social, and cultural rights.
- Argentina launched an app with an accessible design, location, and legal assistance, which complemented the official line against gender violence with a button to call the number and the possibility of also sending a text.

Some disability inclusive responses in India

In India with an unprecedented number of people being forced to stay indoors during the lockdowns, the lived experiences of people in vulnerable positions such as women and girls was a huge concern. They endure disproportionate hardships due to their sex, gender, existing social norms and to add to that, their disability. Women and girls stand at a heightened risk of exposure to domestic violence:

- As the legislature-provided and measures taken by the government fell short in dealing with the issue, a number of non-government organizations stepped up to provide necessary services to victims of gender based violence and child abuse during the pandemic in India. A positive and enabling environment for PwDs through livelihood interventions

Monitor. Available at: <https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/covid-drm>

⁸⁵ Takagi, H. (2021). IBM's latest app helps visually impaired users stand in socially distanced lines. Available at: <https://tech.hindustantimes.com/mobile/news/ibms-latest-apphelps-visually-%20impaired-users-stand-in-socially-distanced-lines-71620648812746.html>

⁸⁶ Mittal, S. and Singh, T. (2021). Gender-Based Violence During COVID-19 Pandemic: A MiniReview. *Frontiers in Global Women's Health*. Available at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fgwh.2020.00004/full>

facilitated the formation and capacity building of Disabled People's Organizations (DPOs) to carry out effective advocacy for their rights on all platforms and levels. Some NGOs in India ensured that people received their income, food supplies, medical help, continuing education, and psycho-social support during the pandemic.

In Kolkata, a 78-year-old man killed his 45-year-old disabled son in a quarrel over wearing a mask. "Over the past few days, the man and his son were having fights regularly because every time the son went out of the house, his father insisted that he should wear a mask and the son refused. One day a heated altercation broke out for the same reason and the man killed his son in a fit of rage. He strangled his son with a cloth,"

- A police officer in India.

- With coronavirus cases surging across the country, getting vaccinated became one of the most important steps in increasing immunity against the deadly infection. Vaccine shortages and overcrowding in vaccination centres, however, was a big concern for those hoping to get the vaccine, especially senior citizens and PwDs. To help ease the crisis, the Mumbai Municipal Corporation set up an effective way of conducting a fast vaccination process by setting up a
- drive-in inoculation centre for PwDs and the elderly. They were vaccinated while sitting in a vehicle, without having to stand in a queue.⁸⁷
- India's central and state governments ran a range of support programmes for vulnerable segments amongst its citizens including PwDs. These programmes operated in the form of direct assistance, partnerships between the central and state governments, and partnerships with not-for-profit organizations (NPOs) including DPOs. These programmes covered areas such as healthcare, education, assistive devices, rehabilitation services, access to jobs, and providing assistive devices. They provided relief (food grains, medicines, masks, and LPG cylinders for cooking) as well as financial support.
- In addition to direct support to individuals, the government also made efforts to support the healthcare system and vulnerable sections of society through the Prime Minister Cares Relief Fund. While the coverage of these programmes improved during the pandemic, they are yet to deliver to their full potential due to structural issues such as lack of a nationwide list of PwDs as well as variable service delivery bottlenecks arising from inaccessible infrastructure, geographical challenges, and/or capacity of the implementing partners.
- Comprehensive Disability Inclusive Guidelines for Protection and Safety of Persons with Disabilities⁸⁸ (Divyangjan) during COVID-19. State governments were instructed to:
- Ensure access to information.

⁸⁷ Mukane, P. (2021). Thane drive-in vaccination. Citizens Foundation Demands Drive in Vaccination for 60+ and Persons with Disabilities. Available at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/thane-citizens-foundation-%20demands-drive-%20in-vaccination-for-60-plus-those-with-%20disabilities/articleshow/82453204.cms>

⁸⁸ <https://enabled.in/wp/covid-19-depwd-issues-comprehensive-disability-inclusive-guidelines/>

- Exempt caregivers from lockdown restrictions.
- Exempt employees with certain disabilities from essential services-related work.
- Provides essential services to quarantine PwDs.
- Give priority in treatment to PwDs.
- Train emergency service providers on the needs of PwDs.

In Patna (India), a man allegedly murdered his wife after she tested positive for COVID-19 and then committed suicide by jumping from the terrace.⁸⁹

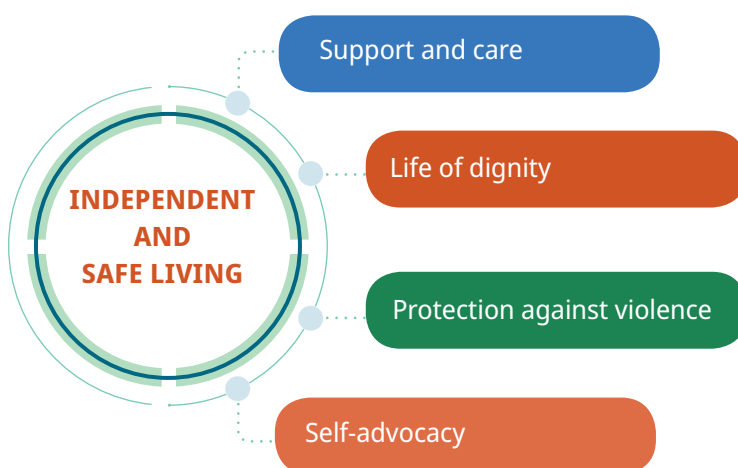
Some promising results from India are:⁹⁰

- The governments in states like Kerala and Nagaland were very active in ensuring the availability of information in accessible formats. The Nagaland state government brought out a daily video briefing on COVID-19 status in the state which included sign language interpretation. In Assam, the State Disaster Management Authority created videos with information on COVID-19 using the Indian Sign Language's (ISL) interpretation and subtitles.
- Nagaland and Tamil Nadu launched a helpline for PwDs catering to people from the state to district level. ISL interpreters were also available to cater to deaf and hard of hearing persons. In Nagaland, a separate number for WhatsApp video calls was also set up for deaf/hard of hearing persons.
- The government in Chhattisgarh issued e-passes for PwDs for their local travel with an attendant if needed.

Similarly, in Bengaluru, the state police launched the Clear Pass app for COVID-19 passes for essential services and emergencies.

- To ensure consistent provision of food and ration, many initiatives were taken by various states. In Tamil Nadu and Nagaland, the disability commissioners issued instructions for specific timings or doorstep delivery of goods from PDS ration shops in coordination with the district administration, partner CSOs, and local churches. The government in Delhi supplied cooked food/dry rations during the pandemic to families with disabilities. Kerala established common kitchens where cooked food was served. Dry rations were provided to those who could not reach these common kitchens.

FIGURE 11: KEYS AREAS THAT EMERGED FROM ANALYSIS OF INDEPENDENT LIVING PRACTICES FOLLOWED IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES



⁸⁹ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/patna/patna-man-killswife-after-she-tests-positive-for-covid-19-later-commitssuicide/articleshow/82260059.cms>

⁹⁰ <https://nhrc.nic.in/sites/default/files/NHRC%20Advisory%20on%20Disability.pdf>

Recommendations based on Policies and Practices

I Accessibility to information and services

- a. Enacting emergency measures to ensure adequate and affordable food and medication distribution for PwDs who could not leave their homes.
- b. Enabling access to justice, women's shelters, social workers, trauma counselling, and other support services for survivors of domestic violence and sexual abuse.
- c. Ensuring accessible community-based accommodation for homeless PwDs.

II Building community support

- a. Formulating a comprehensive training policy for healthcare workers to recognize signs of violence to tackle the issue of gender-based violence.
- b. Actively involving PwDs and their representative organizations in the community for creating awareness regarding the pandemic's impact on PwDs and rights based inclusive response to the pandemic.
- c. Ensuring continued social support to PwDs to have access to health and other services without discrimination.

III Disability specific policies and monitoring mechanisms

- a. Legitimizing necessary measures to protect PwDs and their caregivers, who were in a situation of risk, especially during curfews and lockdowns.
- b. Strengthening helpline services which victims of gender violence can use.

IV Capacity building of PwDs

- a. Ensuring full participation and meaningful involvement of PwDs & their representative organizations at every stage of policymaking.
- b. Empowering disability activists to strengthen their organizations & ensure the provision of reasonable accommodation to PwDs by identifying barriers like blanket prohibitions on leaving home and imposing fines.

Conclusion

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic presents us with an opportunity to transform and repair the cracks in our social structure and include communities that have so far been excluded from the mainstream. The pandemic has highlighted the need for social protection for achieving resilience and recovery. If not addressed through policy and programmes the social crisis may lead to further inequalities, discrimination, and exclusion of many PwDs. To empower vulnerable groups several organizations are working across the globe to recreate inclusive responses.

It is the collective responsibility of governments, teachers, parents, and caregivers to lessen the educational disparities that students with disabilities faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Civil society organizations in various places globally followed practices to mitigate the barriers in the education of the marginalized. Reasonable accommodations were made to make education available to CwDs.

The goal of universal healthcare cannot be achieved without building accessible health facilities for PwDs. Many governments, civil society organizations, and international organizations, including UN entities coordinated in making inclusive policies for dissemination of not only health information and health related services but also for creating an enabling environment for receiving these services.

Mainstreaming the disability approach and improving the mechanisms for coordinating services and resources at the municipal level became fundamental during the COVID-19 pandemic. Disability

cuts across all areas of social life, so in a crisis or health emergency, besides adopting specific action, this should be combined with general policies incorporating the human rights-based approach to disability. This also means promoting networks with new social actors at the municipal and regional levels reaching further populations.

The emerging economic recession as a result of the pandemic led to millions losing their jobs. For PwDs this led to new challenges as well as new opportunities for finding useful employment. Many organizations recognized the importance of workplace accommodations to create more inclusive spaces for everyone, especially the disabled as there are a lot of health concerns that make them more susceptible to COVID-19. Sensitization of society to ensure independent and safe living for PwDs was an important step taken by many stakeholders during the pandemic.

This report makes recommendations for accessibility to information and services; building community support; making disability specific policies and monitoring mechanisms; and capacity building of PwDs for designing more resilient, equitable, and sustainable systems.

To conclude one can say that a Disability Inclusive COVID-19 Response can be achieved across the sectors of education, health, employment, and independent and safe living in line with UNCRPD and SDGs only if there is good coordination among governments and civil society organizations.

