

Persons with disabilities are drastically affected and left behind even more so during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Prior to this, we constantly faced barriers to equally participate in society. The pandemic has rapidly accelerated multiple layers of barriers, due to a lack of accessible, critical, and timely information to guide us in taking necessary precautions to seek immediate help in cases of emergencies. Lack of access to education opportunities contributes to the vulnerability to the crisis due to lack of understanding of medical terms used in public advisories, furthering gaps to proactively take action. Majority of us are unemployed, poor, live-in densely populated areas with extreme living conditions. This escalates our exposure, and raises risks.

The challenges we faced and are still facing are lessons learned presenting opportunities for us all to partner up, redefine, and build back better in every aspect that's imperative for human diversity to thrive. Stakeholders must

- Ensure meaningful consultation with organizations of persons with disabilities and active participation of persons with disabilities across the project cycle phases of the COVID-19 response and recovery, DRR, health, and well-being hereafter.
- Ensure mainstreaming of disability Inclusion beyond COVID-19 response and recovery, through disability analysis and integration of the preconditions of Disability Inclusion
- Establish accountability mechanisms through developing disability disaggregated monitoring and evaluation indicators towards development justice across all sectors and levels.
- Ensure inclusion of persons with disabilities in livelihood and economic recovery including access to employment, education, and capacity-building opportunities.
- Ensure all local, national, and regional publications and materials reflect disability disaggregated data to monitor current and future progress including the 2021 Asia Pacific SDG Progress Report.

Inclusion of persons with disabilities in the COVID-19 response and recovery and beyond is a vital part of achieving the pledge to leave no one behind.