Briefing note on new ESCAP project “Protecting and Empowering Persons with Disabilities in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic”

I. Background

1. Of the estimated 690 million persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, many face barriers to full and effective participation in society and lack an adequate standard of living. These disadvantaged circumstances have made persons with disabilities more vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially those with existing health conditions.

2. While governments have the responsibility to mainstream disability inclusion into pandemic responses, the COVID-19 crisis has put the response capacities of most countries under strain. Some governments thus lack the institutional capacity in the immediate term to fully address the needs of persons with disabilities and to comprehensively mainstream disability rights and inclusion into their COVID-19 responses.

3. At the same time, civil society organizations, including organizations of persons with disabilities, may lack the requisite financial resources to design and/or scale up initiatives to adequately address the needs of persons with disabilities during this critical period.

4. In this context, some governments and organizations of persons with disabilities, have requested for ESCAP’s support in mainstreaming disability rights and inclusion into their COVID-19 responses.

5. ESCAP, with its longstanding experience and mandate in promoting disability rights and disability-inclusive development, is well poised to provide such support, especially in the context of the implementation of the Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific and the Beijing Declaration, including the Action Plan to Accelerate the Implementation of the Incheon Strategy.

* ESCAP/7 SDD/APDPD (3)/WG (6)/INF/7
II. Project description

6. ESCAP has designed the project “Protecting and empowering persons with disabilities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic”. The project is being implemented from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2022, with funding support from Rehabilitation International.

7. The project aims to enhance the capacity of governments and civil society organizations, including organizations of persons with disabilities, to mainstream disability rights and inclusion into both short- and long-term COVID-19 responses, so as to protect and empower persons with disabilities in the context of the pandemic.

8. The project consists of two components: (i) the provision of seed-funding for pilot initiatives that further the protection and empowerment of persons with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic and in its aftermath; and (ii) the development of an accessible dedicated web page on COVID-19 and disability inclusion, to be hosted on ESCAP’s “Make the Right Real” portal.

9. In undertaking the project activities, ESCAP will actively engage and partner with organizations of persons with disabilities, to ensure continued relevance of the project’s activities and outputs in meeting the needs of persons with disabilities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Organizations representing women and girls with disabilities will be represented and closely consulted to effectively incorporate gender perspectives into both project components.

III. Issues for discussion

10. ESCAP wishes to consult the Working Group on the following areas:

- What are the key priority issues to be addressed in selecting pilot initiatives that further the protection and empowerment of persons with disabilities in the context of COVID-19?

- What content and characteristics should the dedicated web page on COVID-19 and disability inclusion possess, to ensure its continued relevance for persons with disabilities, policymakers and other stakeholders responsible for disability inclusion?