



## Front row for the most vulnerable

*A call for equitable and inclusive COVID-19 vaccination roll-outs*

COVID-19 spurs long-term social, economic and environmental disruption in countries both rich and poor. The pandemic deepens existing inequalities and constitutes a serious setback in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Sustainable Development Goals. People with disabilities face continuous discrimination, barriers to services and information and enhanced risk of contraction and health issues during the response to the pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

The World Health Organisation categorises people with disabilities as vulnerable populations during public health emergencies. Their basic rights are increasingly restricted as institutional, environmental and social barriers intensify in a crisis.<sup>2</sup> The challenges people with disabilities face have been extensively documented, however, the increased exposure to COVID-19 and its consequences for 15% of the world's population have been overlooked during the past months. The coming weeks and months provide a new opportunity to break this vicious cycle as global vaccination roll-outs and national vaccination plans begin.

**We ask UN agencies, governments and the private sector to ensure an equitable global distribution of vaccinations to leave no person and no country behind!**

1 UN Secretary-General Policy Brief: A Disability-Inclusive Response to COVID-19. [https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2020/05/sg\\_policy\\_brief\\_on\\_persons\\_with\\_disabilities\\_final.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2020/05/sg_policy_brief_on_persons_with_disabilities_final.pdf)

2 COVID-19 Disability Rights Monitor 2020. <https://covid-drm.org/assets/documents/Disability-Rights-During-the-Pandemic-report-web.pdf>

**We particularly call all state governments, Ministries of Health and relevant policymakers to be inclusive and accessible in the planning, awareness-raising and distribution phase of national vaccination plans.**

This includes considering the **four As of an equitable and inclusive COVID-19 vaccination strategy:**<sup>3</sup>

- 1. Affordability:** COVID-19 vaccinations are available in free or low-cost targeted programs to all people including people with disabilities and support networks of their choice.
- 2. Availability:** By reason of increased exposure to COVID-19 and its consequences, people with disabilities, and support networks of their choice are prioritised in vaccination strategies.
- 3. Accessibility:** All information campaigns are inclusive and accessible to people with disabilities and sites where vaccinations are delivered are physically accessible and guidance is provided at no or low-cost.
- 4. Awareness:** Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) are properly resourced and actively involved in the planning of distribution strategies and related policymaking and the roll-out of information campaigns. Vaccinations happen upon free and informed consent of people with disabilities and related data is collected disaggregated by age, gender and disability and shared in an accessible format.

International cooperation, sharing of good practices and clear and accessible information campaigns are indispensable for achieving equitable and inclusive vaccination roll-outs. It is now time for national governments and Ministries of Health to take all necessary measures to ensure to make space in the front row for the most vulnerable

### About Light for the World

Light for the World is a global disability and development organisation, breaking down barriers to enrich society and unlock the potential in all of us. Our vision is an inclusive society for all where no one is left behind. We enable eye health services and empower people with disabilities in some of the poorest regions of the world.

### Contact

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Editor, Publisher & Photo: Light for the World • Graphic Design: Susanne Fröschl grafikdesign • All data as of December 2020

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3 Further reading and related recommendations:

- ▶ World Health Organization (10/2020): Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Vaccine access and allocation. Accessed 3 December 2020: [https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-\(covid-19\)-vaccine-access-and-allocation](https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-(covid-19)-vaccine-access-and-allocation)
- ▶ International Disability Alliance (12/2020): Reach the furthest behind first: Persons with disabilities must be prioritized in accessing COVID-19 vaccinations. [https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/ida\\_recommendations\\_on\\_accessing\\_covid-19\\_vaccinations\\_final.pdf](https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/ida_recommendations_on_accessing_covid-19_vaccinations_final.pdf)
- ▶ European Disability Forum (10/2020): EU COVID-19 vaccination and testing strategies. Why are persons with disabilities again excluded? (Open Letter). [https://www.edf-feph.org/content/uploads/2021/01/open\\_letter\\_vaccines\\_covid19\\_disability.pdf](https://www.edf-feph.org/content/uploads/2021/01/open_letter_vaccines_covid19_disability.pdf)