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## **Side event on the highest attainable standard of health for persons with disabilities**

**Co-hosted by the European Disability Forum, Germany, Israel, Norway and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**

**Friday, 17 September 2021, 09:00–10:30 CEST (virtual)**

### **Background**

#### ***Setting the scene***

1. With an estimated 135 million people in the WHO European Region living with some form of disability,<sup>1</sup> the inclusion of persons with disabilities and the barriers they face in accessing health care must be addressed in the priorities under the European Programme of Work, 2020–2025 – “United Action for Better Health in Europe” (EPW), which in turn will support both the work of the WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe) towards meeting the Triple Billion targets of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023, and countries’ efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and realizing its ethos of leaving no-one behind.
2. Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities are important aspects of human diversity. Most people will experience difficulties in functioning at some point in their lives. The extent to which a person experiences disability in daily life varies greatly and depends on how their impairment or health condition relates to barriers in society. Disability is a global issue, with health and human rights dimensions, which affects an estimated 15% of the world’s population. Only one in every two persons with a disability can afford health care, including rehabilitation services; and only one in 10 has access to assistive products.<sup>2</sup>
3. To realize the highest attainable standard of health for persons with disabilities, all efforts to advance universal health coverage must be accessible to and inclusive of persons with disabilities. Health systems – that is, policies, workforce, information systems, financing mechanisms as well as strategies on medicines, vaccines, and assistive products – need to

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/Life-stages/disability-and-rehabilitation/areas-of-work/disability>.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.who.int/teams/noncommunicable-diseases/sensory-functions-disability-and-rehabilitation/world-report-on-disability>.

integrate the needs and requirements of persons with disabilities. This includes dismantling physical barriers that prevent access to health facilities and specific interventions, informational barriers that impede health literacy and prevent access to information, and attitudinal barriers that give rise to discrimination.

4. Cross-sectoral public health interventions that address the social, economic, environmental, or commercial determinants of health must be designed to accommodate the requirements of persons with disabilities. In this way, persons with disabilities will also experience the health gains targeted by these interventions.

5. Finally, ensuring disability-inclusive health systems and cross-sectoral public health interventions will feed into and support the development of health emergency preparedness and response plans. As COVID-19 has demonstrated, national and international health emergency plans need to include persons with disabilities in every step of their preparation and implementation.

### ***Call for action***

6. The recently adopted World Health Assembly resolution on the highest attainable standard of health for persons with disabilities (WHA74.8) urges Member States, in collaboration with international organizations, and other relevant stakeholders, including intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations, private sector companies, academia, and organizations of persons with disabilities, to realize the highest attainable standard of health for persons with disabilities, by ensuring access to effective health services as part of universal health coverage, equal protection during health emergencies, and inclusive cross-sectoral public health interventions.

### **Scope and purpose**

7. Co-hosted by the European Disability Forum, Germany, Israel, Norway and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, this side event is intended to raise Member States' awareness about the resolution WHA74.8 and the three pillars for promoting disability inclusion across the health sector. During the event, Member States will share ways in which disability is being integrated into universal health coverage and public health initiatives, including during health emergencies, and explore the next steps in advancing commitment to attaining the highest attainable standard of health for persons with disabilities across the European Region.

8. The objectives of the side event are:

- to raise awareness of resolution WHA74.8 on the highest attainable standard of health for persons with disabilities;
- to identify regional opportunities to highlight the importance of and advance commitments to disability inclusion in the health sector; and
- to define priorities and next steps for the implementation of resolution WHA74.8 in the European Region.

9. The proposed outcome of the side event is to initiate the process of preparing a European framework for action for implementing resolution WHA74.8, to be presented to the WHO Regional Committee for Europe at its 72nd session (RC72).

## **Event outline**

10. The side event will be conducted online. It will feature several presentations, together with surveys to be completed by the participants, and a moderated plenary discussion involving Member States, WHO/Europe technical staff and partners, all of which aim to generate a high level of engagement and interaction.

11. The programme for this side event will be made available on WHO/Europe's website, on the web page for RC71. Captioning and international sign language will be provided throughout the side event.

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