

A photograph of a man in a wheelchair, seen from the side and back, looking out over a cityscape. The image is overlaid with a blue tint. The text is centered over the image.

'MONITORING THE HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACT OF COVID-19 AND RELATED EMERGENCY MEASURES ON PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

**A REPORT THAT TELLS HOW THE COVID-19
LOCKDOWN RULES AFFECTED PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITIES.**

JUNE 2022



Centre for Human Rights | Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa

**REPORT: 'MONITORING THE HUMAN RIGHTS
IMPACT OF COVID-19 AND RELATED EMERGENCY
MEASURES ON PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN
SOUTHERN AFRICA**

A REPORT THAT TELLS HOW THE COVID-19
LOCKDOWN RULES AFFECTED PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITIES.

JUNE 2022



Centre for Human Rights | Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa

Monitoring The Human Rights Impact
Of Covid-19 And Related Emergency
Measures On Persons With Disabilities
In Southern Africa© 2022 Centre for
Human Rights, University of Pretoria



About the Centre for Human Rights

The Centre for Human Rights, Faculty of Law, University of Pretoria, is an internationally recognised university-based institution combining academic excellence and effective activism to advance human rights, particularly in Africa. It aims to contribute to advancing human rights, through education, research and advocacy.

www.chr.up.ac.za



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The development of these Recommendations would not have been possible without the generous support of the *Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa* (OSISA). The Centre for Human Rights acknowledges and appreciates this support. The Centre also thanks *Dr. Willene Holness* who compiled this report and *Ms. Auma MI Dinymoi* who oversaw the successful completion of the research and development of recommendations.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS iii

WORDS USED IN THIS REPORT..... v

1. INTRODUCTION 1

2. REVIEW OF PAST RESEARCH 1

3. METHODS 1

4. INFORMATION ABOUT THE PEOPLE IN THIS STUDY..... 1

5. RESULTS..... 2

6. CONCLUSION 6

7. RECOMMENDATIONS 7

WORDS USED IN THIS REPORT

Accessibility	When the needs of a person with a disability are specially thought about and adapted to. For example using braille so that a person who is blind can read; or having a ramp so that a person in a wheelchair can get into a building.
Autism	A disability where people have difficulty communicating, understanding social rules and learning.
Braille	A system for reading that uses touch on dots for people who are blind.
Captions	Words that explain a picture, or written words that say what the person on a video is saying. Captions can be used by people who are Deaf to know what someone is saying on TV.
Covid-19 pandemic	A time when a sickness spread across the whole world causing many deaths. The sickness was called COVID-19.
Disability or disabilities	When a person has something that makes it difficult for them to do things in the same way as another person. For example being blind is a visual disability.
Lockdown	During the COVID-19 pandemic governments told people they must stay at home and were not allowed to move around. This was called lockdown.
Mental health disabilities	A mental health disability is a disability that stops a person from being able to function fully. Mental health disabilities can not be seen.
PPE	Personal protective equipment. Protection equipment which can help someone to stay healthy. For example masks during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Vaccine	A medicine which helps your body to fight a sickness like COVID-19.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report gives information about how people with disabilities felt during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also tells us how the lockdown rules affected them. 352 people with disabilities or their families answered questions for this report.

We heard that during the COVID-19 lockdown, people with disabilities had more challenges with stigma, discrimination and more human rights abuses.

We did this study because other studies only collected information from people in South Africa, so we needed information from the other Southern African countries.

2. REVIEW OF PAST RESEARCH

Past research shows that government and other big organisations (like National Human Rights Institutions) as well as organisations for people with disabilities must look after the rights of people with disabilities. It is often difficult for people with disabilities to get health, information, food and justice. It is most difficult for people with mental health disabilities and children with disabilities. This review looked at research from Southern African countries and international law.

3. METHODS

People with disabilities and their families were asked questions. We studied their answers using statistics and grouped them into themes.

4. INFORMATION ABOUT THE PEOPLE IN THIS STUDY.

352 people answered questions for this study. Most countries had 50 people giving answers. Namibia had the most answers and Eswatini had the least. 48.6% of people were female. 42.7% were male. 1.7% identified as "other", 1.7% did not want to say and 5.2% did not answer

the question. Most people in the study were people with disabilities or family members of people with disabilities. Most government and big organisations did not allow their workers to help with the study. Most people in the study had physical disabilities or low vision. But some people who were Deaf, hard-of-hearing or deaf-blind also answered.

5. RESULTS

The answers people gave were grouped into themes and are talked about below.

5.1 No supports or services.

The study asked questions about what supports and services people with disabilities could access during lockdown due to COVID-19.

People with disabilities had many problems getting support and services during lockdown. They had problems getting food and basic supplies, personal assistance, medical treatment and therapy. Not having these supports and services affected their quality of life and their rights.

The biggest problem for people with disabilities was access to food and basic supplies. This may be because lockdown stopped people working and moving around. This made it difficult to get food and basic supplies. Many people with disabilities said they could not get personal assistance during COVID-19. For Deaf people, sign-language interpreters were not available during lockdown. This affected them they needed help or go to the hospital.

5.2 What made it difficult to get information and what information did people need?

Most people said that their government gave information on COVID-19 in many languages. But other people said that the information was not in an accessible format. There was not information in Braille (for

the blind). There was also not information in sign-language (for the Deaf). Because they could not get information, people with disabilities had more chance of getting COVID-19. People in the study asked for better training for health workers to give information in accessible formats and in rural areas.

5.3 Difficulty accessing health care

Treatment for COVID-19 (at a hospital/clinic)

The study asked if people with disabilities could get the same treatment for COVID-19 as people without disabilities. There was not space for people to write their answer to this question, so people did not answer it well.

What stops people with disabilities getting healthcare?

People said that there was not any support for people with disabilities to get healthcare. They said that there was not enough medication. They also said that hospitals were expensive to go to and far away.

What stops people with disabilities getting COVID-19 vaccines?

A few people talked about vaccines. This might be because vaccines for COVID-19 were only made after some time. People did say that vaccines were not always available. They also said that it was difficult because they had to travel far to get vaccines. People said that there was not information about vaccines for people with disabilities.

5.4 No social protection

The study showed that people with disabilities did not get social support in the community during the COVID-19 lockdown. If government offered extra money it was difficult to get and the amount was too small. Also people who got disability grants could not always get the extra money. People said that during the COVID-19 lockdown getting enough food and being able to work was difficult and poverty became worse.

5.5 What stops people with disabilities getting support that can protect them?

People with disabilities said that they were not protected in their communities during the COVID-19 lockdown. In some countries people got free water which was good. But most people said that people with disabilities could not get PPEs. It was very difficult to get PPEs in rural places. If a person did not have PPEs then they could not travel or work.

5.6 How did government rules about visiting and traveling affect people living in care homes.

People with disabilities living in care homes were isolated because of the government rules about visiting and travelling. People in the community were also isolated. They could not visit or travel, and their family and friends could not visit or travel. Some people said there was no support for people with mental health disabilities during the COVID-19 lockdown.

5.7 Support for children with disabilities.

The study found that governments did not give support to children with disabilities.

People talked a lot about how closing schools during the COVID-19 lockdown affected children's education and their access to food. But people said that children with disabilities did not get support from their governments. There was also no financial support for their families.

5.8 Protection for homeless people with disabilities.

In the study people said that there was no support or PPE given to "homeless" people, or to people with disabilities in rural areas.

Support for people with disabilities living on the street or in shelters.

The study found that people with disabilities who were homeless or in shelters did not get support from the government.

Support for people with disabilities in rural areas?

People said that there was not support for people with disabilities in the rural areas.

What protective measures were given to people with disabilities?

The study found that there was no government support specially for people with disabilities. The support for people with disabilities was the same as the support for people without disabilities. The needs of the people with disabilities were not met. Sometimes support was given by private organisations or community members.

5.9 Justice with the police and the courts for people with disabilities

People with disabilities said that they did not have a way to get justice. Transport is expensive. It is also expensive for a person to get a lawyer, and there is no legal aid. Lawyers can also be corrupt. Lockdown laws about traveling might have stopped people with disabilities getting justice. But the answers to this question were not clear.

5.10 Including people with disabilities in the COVID-19 lockdown laws

Most people in the study said that people with disabilities need to be included when laws are made. They need to be able to say how the rules will affect them.

People with disabilities were not asked about the COVID-19 lockdown regulations when they were made.

5.11 Discrimination and Stigma for people with disabilities during COVID-19 lockdown.

A lot of people in the study talked about discrimination and stigma for people with disabilities. People with disabilities were not given support for the protection of their lives, health and safety. This means that people with disabilities did not get support, even when the people with disabilities had more risk.

5.12 Government financial difficulties and corruption

Some people said that governments said that there was not enough money to protect people, but other people said that they were not protected because the money went to corruption.

6. CONCLUSION

People who were a part of this study told us how difficult it is for the voices of people with disabilities to be heard. It is important for people with disabilities to be included when rules are made, like the COVID-19 lockdown, so that their needs can be met.

This study showed similar results to other research. Extra information was given about how living in a rural area affects people with disabilities. Also people said that government needs to hear the voices of people with disabilities. Government corruption was seen as a problem.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was done to understand how the rules of the COVID-19 pandemic affected people with disabilities. This information can be used to protect people with disabilities in the future. We hope that this information will be used by governments and organisations who work with people with disabilities. Organisations who work with people with disabilities can check that government protects people with disabilities. Across the world there are laws that say that people with disabilities must be given extra protection and support, specially during times like the COVID-19 pandemic.

These are the ways that people with disabilities can be helped:

Getting healthcare, therapy and assistive devices.

Governments need to make sure that people with disabilities can still get healthcare and therapy, even if there is a pandemic. They also need to get their medicines and support for assistive devices, like repairs or replacement.

People with disabilities need support to get vaccines, and information about vaccines must be accessible for them

Rights of people who are Deaf and use sign language

Governments need to make sure there are sign-language interpreters at all important places like hospitals and clinics. TV captions can also help Deaf people to understand.

Accessible information

Governments should make all information accessible for people with disabilities. This means that they can get the information and they can understand it. This is very important for people in the rural areas. For blind and visually impaired people Braille can help. For Deaf and hard of hearing people Sign language can help. For people who have Autism or little speech, AAC can help. Information should be easy to read. If a government department does not support people with disabilities they should be corrected. Organisations who work with people with disabilities must report if a department is not supporting people with disabilities. Governments should have an easy and safe way for people to report problems.

During COVID-19 people found out most information from the radio and people they talked to. TV can be made accessible for Deaf people with sign language interpretation and captions. Community workers, social workers, child and youth-care workers should also be trained to communicate with people with disabilities and know where they can get help. Community leaders can also help to share important information.

How to get social help

Governments need to make sure that people who have disabilities get the support they need. We think that people with disabilities should be given help. They could not work during the pandemic. Help for women and children must also be seen as important.

How to protect people with disabilities.

It is the best thing to do to give people water for free. The governments should make this happen for everybody.

Giving people PPE is not something that is nice to do, it is a human right. This means that government must work with other organisations and communities to support people with disabilities, and make sure that there is money to do this. PPE should be free or cheap for people with disabilities. The government should help to make sure that even people in rural areas can get PPE. People who are homeless or living in shelters should also get free PPE.

We recommend that governments listen to people with disabilities to hear what they need.

7.6 How do people with disabilities get justice with the police and the courts?

People with disabilities must be given information about how to get information on their rights. If their rights are not being met then people with disabilities need information on how to complain or how to get legal help using free lawyers. Governments and courts must make sure that it is not too difficult for people with disabilities to use the legal system to get justice.

7.7 How can people with disabilities be heard?

People with disabilities should be a part of teams and committees who work to help during disasters. People with disabilities should also be a part of groups who check that support is being provided, specially by the police. The government should ask for help from people with disabilities to know where they should be included.

Communities should have disability groups that meet with organisations and government to make sure that their needs are met when there is a disaster. People with disabilities are affected differently during disasters than other people. So it is important to listen to the voices of people with disabilities to make sure that they are helped.

7.8 How to have equality for people with disabilities.

Governments need to teach people about the rights of people with disabilities, specially in healthcare. It is important for people to understand about equality and that you can not discriminate against a person with a disability.

7.9 How to prevent corruption.

We think that governments must make a special budget for people with disabilities during disaster times. This will help to get food and PPE etc. to people with disabilities. It is important that information about this budget is accessible to people with disabilities.

Governments must make sure that there are people who check that there is no corruption with the money that is meant for people with disabilities. If corruption is found then those people must be taken to court.



**Centre for
Human Rights**
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

www.chr.up.ac.za