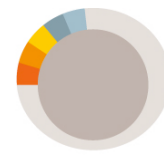


→ **ESPACE ÉTHIQUE**
ASSISTANCE PUBLIQUE - HÔPITAUX DE PARIS



Organisation mondiale de la Santé
→ CENTRE COLLABORATEUR POUR L'ÉTHIQUE
www.espace-ethique.org



PANDÉMIES, ÉTHIQUE, SOCIÉTÉ



Disabilities facing the pandemic risk

Jean-Luc Simon, Chair of European Region, Disabled Peoples International

Why do disabled people have to be seen as a specific category in the field of pandemic preparedness? Are we really talking about a separate group? First, perception of disability is questioned. Why do we call someone “a disabled person” and why do we not resort to this mention? Previously, prisoners have been depicted as a specific group. The fact that they often have health problems (often psychological) was stressed. So, why are they not described as disabled?

“Disability” is not so clear. One of its most frequent consequences is the exclusion from society. That’s why NGOs working in the field of disability struggle to break the vicious circle of exclusion. It is uneasy to live with a disabled person. Who will take care of such persons in a pandemic time?

Disabilities are revealed by adverse circumstances and environments

First, during a pandemic situation, adequate information should be provided to all. Thus, blind people need reliable information printed in Braille format. A lot of sensory disabilities justify particular adaptations in information providing so that people can understand. Psychiatric disorders do not always limit understanding abilities. A lot of people suffering from such disorders are able to execute complex tasks and to take some appropriate decisions in order to care of themselves. Nevertheless, a lot depend on the quality of recommendations transcriptions, in order to make messages understandable. People with mental disabilities have huge learning and understanding difficulties. They often live within dedicated institutions. People keep going in and out of these. The virus can easily spread this way.

We are not talking about a homogeneous population. A disability can alter perception, learning abilities as well as individual mobility. It raises frontiers in everyday's life. And it will be especially true in a pandemic time.

We hope that society will not forget disabled people in case a flu pandemic occurs. In such extreme circumstances, things have to be made more understandable for all, not only for specific vulnerable groups. We will all have to face the same dilemmas with our abilities, our skills and our limits. We should not talk about a population of disabled people. Only a wide range of diverse situations does concretely exist. Disability is often not a problem to consider in itself. Disability is revealed and stressed by particular situations and environments. To some extent, everybody has been, is or will be disabled. This has to be sharply kept in mind when we discuss the potential impact of a flu pandemic on our societies.