

Connecting for Change: Integrating Disability Equity Across Global Health Agendas

Side event of the Seventy-Ninth
World Health Assembly

19 May 2026

12:00 - 13:30 CEST



About the speakers

(in alphabetical order)



Alessandra ARESU //

Director of the Health and Protection Division, Humanity & Inclusion

Dr Alessandra Aresu is the Director of the Health and Protection Division at Humanity & Inclusion (HI). She has been serving with HI for the last 13 years, first as Director of the HI China Programme (2013 -2017) and then as Inclusive Health Policy Lead based in Washington DC (2017-2021). In the last 10 years, she's been one of the leading voices in promoting gender, age and disability inclusion in the health sector and an intersectionality approach in SRHR. She is the author of several publications on the subject. Currently, she also supports the SRH Department of the World Health Organization as Adviser to the Gender and Rights Advisory Panel (GAP) of the Human Reproduction Programme (HRP), and serves as a Foundational Committee member and Workstream co-chair of the WHO Disability Health Equity Network, and as board member of CORE Group.



Sarah COLLINSON //

Senior Policy Advisor, Sightsavers

Dr Sarah Collinson is Senior Policy Adviser at Sightsavers, where she leads policy and advocacy to advance disability inclusion and equity in health systems globally. She also serves as co-chair of the International Disability and Development Consortium's (IDDC) Inclusive Health Task Group and as a Foundational Committee member and Workstream co-chair of the WHO Disability Health Equity Network. She has previously held senior roles at ODI Global, ActionAid and Chatham House, alongside academic affiliations with the universities of Oxford, Reading and Bristol.



John COUGHLAN //

Secretary General, International Cerebral Palsy Society

John Coughlan is the parent of a young adult with cerebral palsy. He has been active in advocating for the rights of people with cerebral palsy and in promoting the engagement of people with lived experience in scientific research for over 15 years. He is a member of the Steering Committee of the WHO Civil Society Commission and of the Foundational Committee of the [WHO Disability Health Equity Network](#).



Joseph ETYANG //

Disability Programme and Inclusion Officer, LVCT Health Organization

Joseph Etyang is an experienced Health and Disability Rights Advocate with over 18 years of dedicated work promoting inclusive healthcare, HIV prevention, and disability policy reform in Kenya. After losing his hearing at the age of 14, he turned his personal experience into national leadership, advocating for Deaf rights, interpreter standards, and equitable health systems. He holds certifications in Leadership & Management in Health (University of Washington), Business Management, Training of Trainers for Sign Language Interpreters, and DeafBlind Interpretation from Sweden. Joseph currently serves as a Disability Program Officer at LVCT Health, leads the Technical Working Group (TWG) at the National Syndemic Diseases Control Council (NSDCC), and is a Board Member at the National Council for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD). His work connects policy, community advocacy, and system strengthening to ensure that no Deaf person is left behind. In recognition of his outstanding contribution to disability inclusion, human rights and advocacy, gender equality and sustainable development, he has received several awards and recognitions as Disability Inclusion Champion and Human Rights Champion in Kenya and internationally.



Anjela JENKINS //

Senior Director, Global Inclusive Health Advocacy, Special Olympics

Anjela Jenkins is Senior Director of Global Inclusive Health Advocacy at [Special Olympics](#). A parent of neurodivergent children, she leads Special Olympics work in global health and health equity and supports efforts of Special Olympics national organizations around the world to strengthen health systems so that they are better able to serve people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. She serves as a co-chair of the [WHO Disability Health Equity Network](#) workstream to elevate health equity for persons with disability as a political priority in health.



Kaloyan KAMENOV //

Technical Lead for Disability, World Health Organization

Kaloyan is the Technical Lead for Disability at WHO, based in Geneva, Switzerland. In this role, he oversees the WHO global agenda on disability, supporting countries to advance health equity for persons with disabilities.



Pearl LÜTHY //

Ambassador for Switzerland, Down Syndrome International

Pearl, 23 years old, has been actively involved in self-advocacy since first speaking about inclusion at the age of 14 at the United Nations in Geneva for World Down Syndrome Day in 2018. Since then, she has been active internationally – presenting at the World Down Syndrome Congress in Glasgow in 2018, working with Inclusion Europe in 2019 for the European Day for people with disabilities in Brussels. She has worked locally in Switzerland for several years as a self-advocate with the Swiss German organizations, Insieme21 and Insieme. She also has been working as an Ambassador for Switzerland with Down Syndrome International since 2023 and has regularly participated and being a presenter and moderator in World Down Syndrome Day workshops and events at the United Nations since 2018. More recently, Pearl has worked with the World Health Organization since 2024 to promote health equity. From her own experience of health, Pearl is interested in helping motivate and educate others to live a healthy life.

Alongside her advocacy work, she is training to be a Kindergarten and Primary school Teacher Assistant in Zürich. Pearl has experience teaching in both English and German. She is committed to inclusion and has also worked supporting children within their inclusion at school. Her passions lie in music and sports, and Pearl performs regularly at events with her violin – both solo and in an orchestra, sings in a choir, performs in a dance group and participates in both Summer and Winter Olympics in swimming and skiing.

Pearl hopes that her presentation at the World Health Assembly will help address and close the gap towards universal health for all people.



Patience OFOSUHEMAA //

Senior Health Promotion Manager and Activity Coordinator for Disability Inclusion and Health Service Delivery, Ghana Health Service

Ms. Patience Ofosuhemaa is a Senior Health Promotion Manager and activity coordinator for Disability Inclusion and health service delivery at Ghana Health Service Headquarters, with over 16 years in health promotion, disability-inclusive systems, risk communication, and social behaviour change.

She pioneered Ghana's first Disability Inclusive Health Service Delivery Guidelines, Africa's first such policy framework. Under her leadership, Ghana institutionalized disability inclusion through national policy, training, and digital learning, designing a nationwide curriculum for health workers and the first Disability Inclusion e-learning module for 6000+ staff.

As Deputy Coordinator of the National Misinformation Taskforce and RCCE master trainer, she trained 8,000+ committee members and addressed 100+ misinformation cases during COVID-19. She has represented Ghana on global platforms, including the WHO, the Africa CDC, and the SBC Summit.

Patience holds an MPH in Health Education and Promotion from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, KNUST, and a BSc from Catholic University College of Ghana. She is currently an Africa CDC Mental Health Leadership Fellow and the University of Washington's International Program for Public Health Leaders, Cohort 9.



Smitha SADASIVAN //

Disability Self-Advocate and Accessibility and Inclusion Consultant, Disability Rights India Foundation

Smitha is an accessibility and inclusion consultant, trainer, and disability rights practitioner based in Chennai (India), bringing lived experience of Multiple Sclerosis to her work. She serves on multiple national and state bodies, including the TN State Advisory Board for Persons with Disabilities, the National Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and WHO's Disability Health Equity Network. She is Chief Accessibility Advisor at IIT Madra's Accessibility Research Centre and a senior advisor on inclusive health policy. A recognised leader, she has received the Government of India's Shreshth Divyangjan Award and several honours for advancing disability inclusion across sectors globally.
