

# WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

## Lead

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## Contributors

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## Structural barriers and negative trends

Women and girls with disabilities constitute 1 in 5 women worldwide. In Europe, women with disabilities are 16% of the total population of women, and 60% of the overall population of persons with disabilities.

Despite their prevalence in the population, women and girls with disabilities face multiple and intersectional discriminations in all areas of life: social isolation, violence (as they are 2-5 times more likely to experience violence than women without disabilities and this is particularly the case for migrant and refugee women with disabilities), forced sterilisation, forced--or lack of access to-- abortion and contraception, lack of access to community support services, low-quality housing, forced treatment and institutionalisation, denial of legal capacity, inadequate health care and denial of the opportunity to contribute and engage actively in society, including unequal access to education and employment leading to a higher risk of living in poverty and barriers in accessing justice, redress and/or engaging in formal complaint mechanisms.

They also face barriers in communication and information, such as lack of sign language interpretation, easy to read, braille, augmentative and alternative formats of communication, and all other accessible modes, means and formats of communication, including electronic ones.

Mothers of children with disabilities also lack access to adequate support services, and often face discrimination based on being associated to their child with disabilities regarding hiring procedures, salary and social security payments and to promotions.

The status of women with disabilities is not only worse than that of women without disabilities, but it is also worse than that of men with disabilities. This is especially so in rural areas, where patriarchal and primary economic systems, with fewer services and opportunities for women with disabilities than in urban environments, are still predominant.

Although the women's movement has done important work to advocate for change, empower and prepare women for the struggle for equality, the same cannot be said for women with disabilities. On the one hand, the mainstream women's movement has still very limited knowledge of the needs and barriers faced by women with disabilities. On the other hand, the disability movement has also failed to focus sufficiently on these needs and barriers, despite the gendered lens some organizations have attempted to integrate in their various programs. Consequently, women and girls with disabilities remain on the fringes of all human rights movements and remain bogged down in a clearly disadvantageous position within society.

Moreover, women and girls with disabilities and their representative organisations are not involved nor closely consulted in all levels of policy making, particularly with regards to decisions that affect their lives.



## **Progress on implementing the Beijing Platform for Action**

180 countries worldwide have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). This includes the EU and all its member states. The CRPD calls in its article 6 to 'take measures to ensure the full and equal enjoyment by them of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to ensure the full development, advancement and empowerment of women'. In addition, 189 countries worldwide, including all EU member states have ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Under both CRPD and CEDAW, states have an obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of women with disabilities in relation to their sexual and reproductive health and rights and to address and eliminate all forms of discrimination faced by women with disabilities. They should adopt measures to ensure respect for women with disabilities' ability to make autonomous and informed decisions in their lives, including about their health.

In addition, both national policy makers and the EU are bound by the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). SDG 5 aims at achieving gender equality and women's

empowerment. However, the rights of women and girls with disabilities are not mainstreamed in national and European efforts on SDG 5.

The EU and its Gender Equality Institute have adopted indicators for the follow up of the Beijing Platform for Action since 1999 and reviewed its implementation. Amongst its three strategic objectives, there is “ensure equality and non-discrimination under the law and in practice” to under which the rights of women and girls with disabilities should be protected. However, the intersectional discrimination has not been taken into account in these objectives and women and girls with disabilities’ concerns have not been included.



## Recommendations beyond Beijing+25

- to develop effective measures in order to mainstream the rights of women and girls with disabilities in gender policies, programmes and measures, as well as to design and develop specific positive action measures to achieve the advancement of women and girls with disabilities;
- to fully involve women and girls with disabilities and their representative organisations in developing and implementing policies on gender equality and women’s rights;
- to ratify the Council of Europe’s Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) and ensure that the perspectives of women and girls with disabilities are included in all policies preventing and combatting violence, including prohibiting forced sterilisation and abortion;
- to include in all legislation and policies implementing the Beijing Platform for Action an intersectional approach and guarantee the human rights of all women and girls with disabilities;
- - to establish an EU mechanism to monitor the commitment made at the Cairo and Beijing conferences, education programmes and actions;
- to support and fund research at European and national level on intersectional discrimination and social exclusion that women and girls with disabilities face- to this extent, sex and disability indicators should be included in all research and reports on non-discrimination and equal opportunities;
- to utilize quality gender- and disability-disaggregated data to comprehensively inform state action and ensure the rights of women with disabilities are protected and upheld in all policies, legislation, and action plans;
- to abolish systems of guardianship that allow guardians or others to make important decisions about the lives and health of women and girls with disabilities without their consent. In place of these systems, establish regimes that connect women and girls with disabilities with support services, when requested, to make their own decisions and to participate in justice mechanisms;

- to uphold the commitments set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), including its Optional Protocol and General Comment no.3 on women and girls with disabilities, in light of their objectives and purpose.