



EDF recommendations on the EU Gender Equality Strategy post-2019

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About the European Disability Forum

The European Disability Forum (EDF) is an umbrella organisation of persons with disabilities that defends the interests of over 100 million persons with disabilities in the European Union. We are a unique platform which brings together representative organisation of persons with disabilities from across Europe. We are run by persons with disabilities and their families, and as such represent a strong, united voice of persons with disabilities in Europe. Specific expertise on gender and women's rights issue is provided by EDF Women's Committee. EDF is committed to the women's movement and an active member of the European Women's Lobby.

Introduction

During the last decade, the European Commission adopted a [Strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015](#) and a [Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019](#). Both documents failed to include and address the specific situation of women and girls with disabilities, while they constitute an important group of women facing discrimination and other violations of their rights. Each document only made three symbolic references to disability.

The purpose of our position paper is to inform the European Commission in its preparation of the next Gender Equality Strategy. It includes the main priorities of women and girls with disabilities in Europe and foster an intersectional approach of gender equality.

EDF actively participated in the last two surveys on gender equality in the European Union (EU) conducted by the European Commission.

Background information on women and girls with disabilities in the European Union

Women with disabilities constitute **16% of the total population of women in the European Union**, and 60% of the overall population of 100 million persons with disabilities. This corresponds to an estimated 60 million of women; equivalent to the total population of Italy.

Women and girls with disabilities face multiple and intersectional discrimination in all areas of life, including, socio-economic disadvantages, social isolation, violence against women, forced sterilisation and abortion, lack of access to community services, low-quality housing, institutionalisation, inadequate healthcare and denial of the opportunity to contribute and engage actively in society. Women with disabilities are also two to five times more likely to face violence.

The status of women and girls with disabilities is not only worse than that of women without disabilities, but also worse than that of their male peers. This is especially so in

rural areas with fewer services and opportunities for this group than in urban environments.

EU's obligations to ensure the rights of women and girls with disabilities under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ([CRPD](#)) is an international human rights treaty ratified by the EU and all its Member States. It commits all who ratify it to implement and promote the full realisation of all human rights for all persons with disabilities through the adoption of new political tools and review of existing policies.

Equality between men and women is a general principle of the CRPD (Article 3). In addition, article 6 of the Convention specifically recognises that women and girls with disabilities are subject to multiple discrimination and requires States parties to "take measures to ensure the full and equal enjoyment by them of all human rights and fundamental freedoms" and "ensure the full development, advancement and empowerment of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of the human rights" set out in the Convention. The CRPD also has to be implemented in light of the CRPD Committee's [General Comment No. 3 on women and girls with disabilities](#).

In 2015 the CRPD Committee adopted specific recommendations to be followed by the EU in its [Concluding observations on the initial report of the EU](#). The Committee made the following recommendations to the EU on women and girls with disabilities:

- Mainstreaming of a women and girls with disabilities perspective in its forthcoming gender equality strategy, policies and programmes, and a gender perspective in its disability strategies
- Development of affirmative actions to advance the rights of women and girls with disabilities
- Establishment of a mechanism to monitor progress
- Funding of data collection and research on women and girls with disabilities
- Accession to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) as a step to combating violence against women and girls with disabilities

EDF recommendations for the Gender Equality Strategy post-2019

EDF calls for the adoption of an ambitious EU strategy on gender equality post-2019 which is sufficiently resourced. The Strategy should include the multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination faced by women and girls with disabilities, and other marginalised groups.

It should be based on the fundamental rights of women and men in the EU, as established in the EU treaties, the Fundamental Rights Charter and the UN CRPD to

which the EU and all its member states are party. The Strategy should also be consistent with EU external action and the Sustainable Development Goals.

1. Ensuring a holistic and intersectional approach to gender equality

To ensure that in its gender policies, the European Commission leaves no woman or girl behind, EDF recommended that the following points be included in its next Gender Equality Strategy:

- The European Commission should focus on **all** women and the intersectional and multiple discrimination they face, for instance on the ground of disability, age, race, sexual orientation, gender identity and religion or belief.

All EU policies must include a gender and intersectional perspective. The European Commission should particularly ensure the inclusion of disability when promoting gender equality and women's rights across the world, for instance when implementing the Spotlight initiative.

- Women and girls from marginalised groups should be directly consulted and involved in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of EU policies and programmes that concern them. The European Commission should particularly ensure that women and girls with disabilities are involved in line with article 4.3 of the CRPD by ensuring accessible information, accessible consultation processes and provision of reasonable accommodation. Funding should be provided for women and girls with disabilities and their representative organisations to build their capacity to be involved in public decision making.

In addition, the next strategy should include references to the CRPD, a full analysis of the situation of women and girls with disabilities, and objectives, initiatives, targets and indicators addressing women and girls with disabilities.

All mainstream gender equality initiatives should include women and girls with disabilities.

2. Combatting gender based and domestic violence

Women and girls with disabilities are [two to five times more exposed to violence](#) than other women and girls. For instance, [6 out of 10 women with intellectual disabilities report being sexually abused](#). Violence may take place in various settings (including in institutions and segregated schools) and take different forms, including sexual violence, but also [forced abortion and sterilisation](#).

Women and girls with disabilities face also more difficulties to report violence and claim their rights because of accessibility and legal barriers. For instance, police offices, court building or even victim shelters may not be accessible for women using a wheelchair, or emergency number not accessible for deaf women.

In order to address gender based and domestic violence, EDF recommends that the European Commission prioritise the following actions:

- Accession and implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)
- Introducing new EU legislation to combat gender-based violence such as a directive on combatting violence against women, with focus on women with disabilities, including measures to combat forced sterilisation and forced abortion, in particular against women and girls with disabilities and Roma women and girls.
- Ensuring that gender-based violence is addressed within relevant EU policies and strategies (education, humanitarian aid, digital agenda, etc.). All actions should be part of a comprehensive EU Strategy to end violence against women and girls, including prevention, awareness-raising, and the implementation of EU Victims' Rights Directive.
- Collecting data and conducting research on the root causes, prevalence, consequences and costs of gender based and domestic violence. Data and research should be disaggregated to inform on the specific situation of marginalised groups, including women and girls with disabilities. Experts with specific expertise on disability and the link between disability, gender and violence should participate to data collection and research.
- Training and capacity building of professionals, such as support service providers, healthcare and criminal justice professionals. All professionals should be trained on violence against women and girls, in particular those working with marginalised groups of women such as women and girls with disabilities, including those living in institutions.

3. Combatting prejudice and unconscious bias

In addition to gender stereotypes, women and girls with disabilities face additional bias and prejudice because of their disability. These biases directly affect, among other, the recognition of their legal capacity, access to justice and respect of their [sexual and reproductive health and rights](#). For instance, many women with disabilities are less believed by the police when they report a crime or gender-based violence, including rape.

As a way to tackle persistent gender stereotypes, denoting “typical” or “normal” behaviours and choices for girls and women, and for men and boys, EDF recommends that the European Commission:

- Take measures to raise awareness on stereotyping with an intersectional approach, to ensure that women and girls with disabilities do not face multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination and additional violation of their rights. This could include public campaigns to change perceptions about girls and women with disabilities as ‘weak, dependent and sexless beings’.
- Encourage schools and educational institutions to include gender equality topics in the curricula from a young age, including from an intersectional approach to ensure that all women and girls are represented and can equally be informed

about their rights and participate in the discussion, including information about their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

- Promote training for medical professionals on health rights of women and girls with disabilities, including necessity to ensure accessibility of medical facilities, devices (such as gynaecological chairs), accessible information and communication.
- Fund projects and initiatives by civil society and national authorities addressing gender stereotypes, in particular those including an intersectional approach.
- Collect disaggregated data on the prevalence of different gender stereotypes amongst Europeans.
- Support the involvement of women with disabilities in gender equality/women's rights movements and as role models for change, and provide funding for women and girls with disabilities to join or establish representative organisations.

4. Addressing lower employment and poverty

Women with disabilities are more at risk of lower employment and poverty comparing to both other women, and to men with disabilities. On average, only 48.3% of women with disabilities are in employment in the EU, compared with 53.3% of men with disabilitiesⁱ. In addition, figures indicate that 29.5% of women with disabilities in the EU are at risk of poverty and social exclusion compared to 27.5% of men with disabilitiesⁱⁱ.

To increase women's participation in the labour market and to tackle gender employment, pay and pension gaps, which contribute to poverty, EDF recommends that the European Commission:

- Provide targeted active labour market measures for specific groups of women, including women and girls with disabilities.
- Ensure awareness of legal rights, including the rights to work and employment, with a specific focus on accessibility and reasonable accommodation in line with the UNCRPD.
- Better enforce EU legislation, for instance by improving access to justice and by empowering equality bodies.
- Make sure it is beneficial financially for women, including women with disabilities, to work (by changing rules on taxes and social protection rights, where possible and necessary), in particular by addressing the unequal distribution of unpaid care work and the persistent gaps in pay and pensions and ensuring that women and men become equal-earners-equal-carers throughout their lives. In this respect, the transposition of the 2019 European Work-life Balance Directive is of key importance, and needs to be supported by adequate budgetary and informational measures from the EU.
- Empower all women to get the same opportunities as men to develop their careers and reach leading positions in companies and in politics

5. Ensuring gender and disability budgeting

In order to give life to its next Gender Strategy, the European Commission must ensure that sufficient budget is allocated for its implementation. EDF also recommended that gender and disability budget be made available to civil society organisation with a specific focus on intersectionality.



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Should you have any problems in accessing the documentation, please contact the EDF Secretariat. (Tel: +32 (0) 2 282 46 00, Email: info@edf-feph.org).

ⁱ EU SILC 2017

ⁱⁱ EU SILC 2018, except for Slovakia, Ireland and the UK for which that data is from 2017.