



# **The United Nations Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women**

**A Guide for Organisations of Persons with  
Disabilities**

**September 2020**

This document offers guidance to organisations of persons with disabilities including organisations of women with disabilities, and other organisations interested in advancing the rights of women and girls with disabilities on how to engage with the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

It gives practical information related to:

- Participation in the review of country
- Submission of complaints
- Submission of information for Days of General Discussion/General Recommendations

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## Abbreviations

CEDAW – Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women

CRPD - Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

CSO – Civil Society Organisation

DPO/OPD - Disabled Persons Organisation or Organisation of Persons with Disabilities ([see an non-exhaustive list of organisations of women with disabilities in Europe](#)).

LOIs – List of issues

LOIPR – List of Issues Prior to Reporting

UN - United Nations

## Document colour code and headings

This document will highlight sections using the colour code and headings (level 5) below.

- Orange: Committee input
- Purple: State input
- Green: DPO/OPD input
- Yellow: Examples
- Blue: More information

# The United Nations Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women

The [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW) is an international human rights treaty that protects the rights of all women. It obliges the 187 countries (“State Parties”) that ratified it to take actions to combat discrimination against women. It was ratified by all countries of the European Union. The European Union itself has not ratified it.

The [United Nations Committee on the Elimination of the Discrimination Against Women](#) (“the Committee”) is the expert Committee in charge of monitoring the implementation of CEDAW. It is composed of **23 experts on women’s rights** elected by countries that ratified the Convention who serve in their individual capacity, not as representatives of the countries that elected them. Members serve for two year terms and are eligible for re-election once. A Chairperson, 3 Vice-Chairpersons and a Rapporteur are appointed among the members of the Committee.

[The full list of the current members of the Committee and their CV is available at this link.](#)

## How the Committee works

### Committee Sessions

The Committee has **3 sessions per year** in Geneva, Switzerland (usually in March, July, and October). The schedule of past and upcoming sessions [is available online](#).

At these meetings, the Committee:

- Evaluates how countries apply the Convention and formulates Concluding observations that include recommendations on what they must do to protect women’s rights
- Discuss how the Convention must be interpreted and implemented with the adoption of General Recommendations
- Receives claims of violations of rights from individuals or groups of individuals
- Start inquiries into situations of systematic violations of women’s rights

## Example

[At its last session](#) (July 2020) the Committee worked on a General Recommendation on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration and hold a briefing by the UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia on the impact of COVID-19 on women's and girls' livelihoods across the region. This was the first ever online session due to COVID-19.

## Committee Pre-session

The Committee has **3 pre-sessions per year** in Geneva, Switzerland. They each take place one week after the end of the regular sessions described above. The pre-sessional working group is composed of 5 members of the Committee.

At these meetings, the pre-sessional working group adopts List of Issues and List of Issues Prior to Reporting to evaluate how countries apply the Convention.

## Commission on the Status of Women

Once a year the Committee participates in a two weeks event called the [Commission on the Status of Women \("CSW"\)](#) at the UN Headquarters in New York City, USA, which includes State officials from all countries that ratified the Convention, members of the Committee and civil society such as women's rights organisations, human rights organisations and organisations of persons with disabilities.

## More information

- [FAQs about the CEDAW Convention and CEDAW Committee](#)

## The Committee and persons with disabilities

16% of women in the European Union have disabilities, which is an estimated 60 million of women and girls with disabilities (equivalent to the total population of Italy). CEDAW is committed to eliminating all forms of discrimination and achieving gender equality, which implicitly includes understanding and addressing the rights of women and girls with disabilities.

In 1991 the Committee adopted a [General Recommendation](#) explaining that State parties should "**provide information about disabled women**

**in their periodic reports, and on measures taken to deal with their particular situation.”** These measures include equal access to education, employment, health Services and social security, social and cultural life.

As this document was adopted before the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) and has to be read in the light of the CRPD and its [General Comment No. 3 on women with disabilities](#). The CRPD does not fully cover the multiple issues faced by women, and the CEDAW does not fully cover issues faced by women with disabilities.

**More information**

CRPD Committee [General Comments No. 7 on Participation with persons with disabilities in the implementation and monitoring of the Convention](#) ([Easy to Read English version here](#)).

**Differences between the CEDAW and CRPD Committees**

*Table of differences between the CEDAW and CRPD Committees*

	<b>CEDAW Committee</b>	<b>CRPD Committee</b>
<b>Purpose</b>	Monitors the CEDAW since 1982	Monitors the CRPD since 2006
<b>Membership</b>	23 experts on women’s rights	18 experts on disability rights
<b>Meetings</b>	3 per year (3-4 weeks long)	2 per year (4-5 weeks long)
<b>Documents adopted</b>	List of Issues and List of Issues Prior to Reporting Concluding Observations General recommendations Views on communication Reports on inquiry	List of Issues and List of Issues Prior to Reporting Concluding Observations General comments Views on communication Reports on inquiry
<b>Permanent working group</b>	<a href="#">Working Group on discrimination against women and girl</a>	No

## What CEDAW needs from DPOs

The Committee rarely elects expert women with disabilities and country reports often do not include information on women and girls with disabilities, so they rely on DPOs for information to obtain information relevant to people with disabilities. Ana Peláez Narváez (EDF Vice President) was the first woman [from the disability movement](#) elected to the Committee in 2018.

Women and girls with disabilities face multiple and intersectional discrimination in all areas of life. This includes social isolation, 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.

You can provide information on the situation of women and girls with disabilities in your country relevant to the implementation of the Convention. You can also raise more general issues that the Committee should address in its overall work.



# Country Review and Alternative Reporting

## How countries are reviewed by the Committee

State Parties must submit regular reports to the Committee on how the rights of the Convention are implemented. The initial report must be submitted 1 year after the ratification of the Convention and periodic reports either at least every 4 years, whenever requested by the Committee, or following an optional simplified review procedure.

The Committee reviews each country's report and addresses its concerns and recommendations in the form of

- **List of Issues (LOIs) or List of Issues Prior to Reporting:** List of 20 questions with up to 3 issues each that helps the Committee to clarify the information given by the government in its report and asks additional information.
- **Concluding Observations:** Document that highlights areas of concerns and recommendations.

The country review takes place during the “**sessions**” held by the Committee in Geneva. It includes an oral presentation by the State Party and a series of questions by Committee members in what is referred to as an “**interactive dialogue**”. **Pre-sessional working groups** consists of up to five geographically diverse members of the Committee. At the **pre-sessions**, countries adopt LOIs.

The Committee invites CSOs including DPOs to provide **written submissions** about the situation in the countries that will be reviewed during the first days of the sessions. DPOs can also inform **orally** the Committee about their issues, in a private meeting separate from the dialogue between the country representatives and the Committee.

In short:

- 1) State Party submits its report to the Committee
- 2) Geneva pre-session 1: Pre-sessional working group for country X and adoption of LOI
- 3) Government submits a reply to the LOI within 2-3 months
- 4) Geneva session 3: Country X interactive dialogue and concluding observations
- 5) Implementation of Concluding Observations by country X government

## How you can get involved in the review process

Below is a timeline of the review process with the State Party input in purple, Committee input in orange and how you can get involved in green. In the next section, we will go into detail about how you can shape your input in the form of **written submissions** and **oral presentations**.

### First review and regular procedure

#### State input

The government sends its State report to the Committee

#### DPO/OPD input (written)

Find out when your country is scheduled for review and submit an **alternative report** to provide information beyond the State report, whether it adds information to it or corrects it.

Reports must be submitted to the [Secretariat of the Committee](mailto:cedaw@ohchr.org) at [cedaw@ohchr.org](mailto:cedaw@ohchr.org) with the subject “**submission**” and the “**name of the country**” (e.g. “Submission Spain”) **up to 4 weeks before the start of the session during which the country is considered for the LOI or Concluding Observations.**

- **Word limit:** 3500 words for DPOs and 6000 words for CSO coalitions
- **Language:** The Committee works in the six UN languages (English, French, Chinese, Russian, Arabic and Spanish) but does not translate alternative reports. We recommend that you submit your report in English.
- **Format:** Word or text **not PDF**

or

- You may submit shorter report with thematic issues including a list of suggested questions for the Lists of Issues or List of Issues Prior to Reporting.

More information on page 15 - How to prepare your alternative report

## Geneva pre-session 1

### Informal private meeting

#### Committee input

The pre-sessional working group meets jointly with organisations of different countries up for review to listen to CSOs and ask them questions before they adopt their list of issues. It is a **private informal meeting** between the pre-sessional working group and CSOs. It usually takes place the first day of the pre-session (Monday).

#### DPO/OPD input (oral)

You can take this opportunity to stress which questions should be included in the list of issues.

- To participate you must send a request to the [Secretariat](#) (as you submit your alternative report) before the deadline set for each session. To know the exact deadline, check the [announcement on the Committee website](#) and do not hesitate to contact EDF for information.
- Interpretation is provided in English, Spanish, and French. To deliver your statement in other languages, you must bring your own interpreter at your own costs.
- Prepare a very short oral statement on the major issues in your country and submit it in writing by e-mail to the Secretariat of the Committee a few days before your meeting. All CSOs of one country are allocated up to 10 minutes, meaning you may only have a couple of minutes to speak, then the Committee members ask questions to the organisations.
- You can participate in person or via video-conference that must be scheduled in advance with the Secretariat of the Committee (see the requirements in the “informative note for participation” published before each session). The UN does not provide funding for participation.

#### Committee input

After meeting the CSOs they examine the State report and **adopt a list of issues (LOI)**.

## After Geneva Pre-session 1

### Committee input

The LOIs are **published** on the [Committee's website](#) in English a few weeks after the end of the session.

### Example of List of Issues

- [Examples of List of Issues](#)

### State input

The government submits a **reply to the LOI** within 2-3 months after the pre-session.

### DPO/OPD input (written)

You can

- Revise your alternative report (add more information) or submit it
- Submit an alternative reply to the LOI

## Geneva Session 2

There is nothing about the countries up for review at session 3 at this stage.

## Geneva Session 3

### Meetings with CSOs

### Committee input

The Committee meets with CSOs and ask them questions about the situation in their countries. There are two meetings with CSOs: an **informal public meeting** and a **lunchtime private briefing**.

- Informal public meeting: the Committee meets for 1h to 1h30 jointly with CSOs of different countries up for review during the session 3.
- Lunchtime private meeting: the Committee meets for 1h with CSOs of a specific country.

### DPO/OPD input (oral)

You can take this opportunity to stress which recommendations should be included in the concluding observations.

- To participate you must send a request to the [Secretariat](#) (as you submit your alternative report) before the deadline set for each session. To know the exact deadline, check the [announcement on the](#)

[Committee website](#) and do not hesitate to contact EDF for information.

- Interpretation is provided in English, Spanish, and French. To deliver your statement in other languages, you must bring your own interpreter at your own costs.
- Prepare a very short oral statement on the major issues in your country and submit it in writing by e-mail to the Secretariat of the Committee a few days before your meeting. All CSOs of one country are allocated up to 10 minutes, meaning you may only have a couple of minutes to speak, then the Committee members ask questions to the organisations.
- Participation via video-conference to the informal public meeting is possible. It needs to be scheduled in advance with the Secretariat of the Committee (see the requirements in the “informative note for participation” published before each session). The UN does not provide funding for in person participation.

## Interactive Dialogue

### Committee input

The Committee organises an **interactive dialogue** with State representatives organised in 2 meetings that last 3 hours each. They asks questions on implementation of articles of the Convention to State representatives

### State input

**Must respond** to Committee questions orally.

### DPO/OPD input

You may attend this meeting but not speak at it. Interactive dialogue are public events streamed [on UN WebTV](#).

### Committee input

The Committee adopts a document called **Concluding Observations** that highlights areas of concerns and recommendations.

## After Geneva Session 3

### Committee input

The Concluding observations are **published** on the [Committee's website](#) in English a few weeks after the end of the session.

## Example of Concluding Observations

- [Examples of concluding observations](#)

## DPO/OPD input

You can:

- **Translate them** to your national language and use them in your advocacy.
- **Organise a press conference** to present the recommendations or follow-up meetings with your government to discuss implementation of the recommendations.

## State input

The Country must implement the recommendations adopted by the Committee and send a new report every four years following the same procedure, or if they accepted the **simplified review procedure** of the Committee, the next review will start by the adoption of a list of issues prior to reporting (LOIPR) by the Committee.

## Optional simplified review procedure

Countries that have been reviewed at least once may be reviewed through an optional simplified procedure. You may get involved at the same stages highlighted above (omitted below).

## Geneva Pre-session 1

### Committee input

The Committee schedules a new review of the country during its pre-session. During the meeting, it adopts a **list of issues prior to reporting (LOIPR)**. It is a list of questions that asks the countries about the implementation of the **last Concluding Observations** and overall implementation of CEDAW.

## After Pre-Session 1

### State input

The government's reply to the list of issues prior to reporting is considered as the "**State report**" that will be the basis of the review.

### Committee input

After receiving the reply, the Committee **schedules the official review** through an Interactive Dialogue at one of its next sessions.

## Next Geneva Session

### Committee input

During the **Interactive Dialogue** the Committee **asks specific questions on implementation** of articles of the Convention to State representatives

### State input

Must reply orally.

### Committee input

After the interactive dialogue, the Committee **adopts new Concluding Observations**.

## After Geneva Session

### State input

The government **must implement the new Concluding Observations** until its next review by the Committee.

### More information

- [The review process](#)
- [The simplified review procedure](#)
- [The list of countries that accepted to be reviewed](#) under the simplified review procedure
- [Examples of lists of issues, lists of issues prior to reporting and concluding observations adopted by the Committee](#)

## How to prepare your alternative report

We recommend the following structure:

- 1) **A short introduction to your organisation/coalition:** its history and who it represents. The aim is to establish your credibility.
- 2) **An executive summary of the most relevant issues:** it should reflect what you think requires particular attention of the Committee when reviewing the State report.
- 3) **A critical analysis of the situation of women and girls with disabilities in your country in light of the Convention:** You can provide information on access to education, employment, justice, discrimination, violence, legal capacity, institutionalisation, etc.

- Do not expect the Committee to know anything about the issues faced by women and girls with disabilities in your country and about disability rights in general. Your report must be self-explanatory.
- Include your sources and cross-reference to the State's report (e.g. "para. X of the State report").
- Use information provided to and by the CRPD Committee previously, including recommendations from that Committee on women and girls with disabilities to stress that the issues have been condemned in the past.
- Use the correct terminology and quotation marks when referring to the language used by the State.
- Avoid abbreviations and acronyms.
- Each suggested question or recommendation must be linked to information provided in your report. Be specific, taking into consideration the kind of actions you aim to inspire from the questions or recommendations.
- Contact women's organisation to join forces and share information. You can make them more aware about the situation of women and girls with disabilities. [See the members of the European Women's Lobby here.](#)

### Examples of alternative reports

- Association of Entrepreneurs with Disabilities of the Republic of Moldova "European skills without limits": [submission for concluding observation on Moldova](#) (2020)
- Belgian Disability Forum: [submission for LOIPR on Belgium](#) (2019)
- Fundación CERMI Mujeres: [submission for LOIPR on Spain](#) (2019)
- Italian Disability Forum: [submission for concluding observations on Italy](#) (2017)
- Lithuanian Disability Forum: [submission for concluding observations on Lithuania](#) (2019)
- SUSTENTO: [submission for the concluding observations on Latvia](#) (2020)

### How to prepare your statement in Geneva

- **Prepare your statement and coordinate with the other organisations who may be present during the meeting.** Contact your national equality body, human rights institution and women's rights organisations to know if they will participate.



- **Focus on your priorities** (what you want to see in the list of issues and recommendations) and on providing additional information not in your alternative report.
- **Reach out to EDF and the International Disability Alliance:** let us know that you will be attending the meetings of the Committee so we can support you ([info@ida-secretariat.org](mailto:info@ida-secretariat.org)).
- CSOs wishing to make oral interventions may contact IWRAW-Asia Pacific ([iwraw-ap@iwraw-ap.org](mailto:iwraw-ap@iwraw-ap.org)) for support.

## Committee responses to Complaints

The Committee can examine violations of women's rights in countries ratified by the Convention **and** its [Optional Protocol](#). Although their decisions are not legally binding, they send a strong message to countries that violate the rights of women.

### Views on individual communications

#### Committee input

For complaints concerning one or several women who have **exhausted domestic remedies** (including appeals, until the judgement cannot be contested), the Committee adopts a written procedure called "views on individual communications". **Complaints cannot be anonymous.**

#### Examples

In February 2020, the Committee adopted [views on a communication on obstetric violence](#) (violence experienced by women during facility-based childbirth) in Spain. It asked the government to financially compensate the victim and take measures to protect women's rights to safe motherhood and access to appropriate obstetric services, and to combat obstetric violence.

2 cases [were recently examined](#) concerning women with disabilities murdered by their husbands in Moldova and Finland but were inadmissible because they had not been through the national courts.

### Inquiries

#### Committee input

For systematic violations (which can include anonymous complaints) the Committee can launch an [inquiry](#) which may include a country visit. The reports of inquiries are available on [the Committee's website](#).

#### Example

In 2018 the Committee published a [report on an inquiry on the restrictive access to abortion for women and girls in Northern Ireland](#). It found that the criminalisation of abortion and highly restrictive policy on access to abortion constituted a systemic violation of the Convention. It also noted that compelling women to carry pregnancies to full term, including for victims of rape, constituted gender-based violence against women.

## How you can contribute to the work on complaints

### DPO/ODP input

Translate the [guidelines for submission of communication](#) from English to your national language so more people understand how to get involved.

### Submit an individual communication or information for inquiry to the Committee

As a DPO you can directly submit a communication or send information for inquiry to the Committee. If you submit a communication on behalf of an individual, you must have written consent to act on their behalf.

### More information

- [Individual complaint](#)
- [Inquiry](#)

# General Recommendations and Day of General Discussion

## Committee input

General Recommendations are the documents that explain in more detail the content of one or several rights in the Convention and how they should be implemented by countries. They are the equivalent of the General Comments adopted by the CRPD Committee. So far, the Committee has adopted [37 General Recommendations](#) on a variety of topics. Announcements of the work on new general recommendations are posted on the [website of the Committee](#).

## Example

In 2017 adopted general recommendations on [the right of girls and women to education](#) then in 2018 on [the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change](#).

## DPO/OPD input

At some sessions, the Committee may organise a “Day of General Discussion” unrelated to the country reviews where CSOs are invited to make oral statement which help members of the Committee to draft General Recommendations on specific articles or topics covered by the Convention.

CSOs may also be asked to send written submissions.

The requirements to submit written submissions and interventions vary. Consult the [Committee website](#) for information on new general recommendations and instructions on contributions.

## Example

The Committee is currently working on recommendations on **trafficking of women and girls in the context of global migration**. See examples of contributions from organisations by organisations of persons with disabilities and of women with disabilities

- [European Disability Forum and International Disability Alliance](#)
- [CERMI Women’s Foundation](#)
- [Femmes pour le dire, femmes pour agir](#)
- [Women Enabled International and Disability Rights International](#)

## Definition recap

- **Session:** Gathering in Geneva hosted by the Committee during which take place country reviews.
- **Pre-session:** One week meeting of the pre-sessional working group of the Committee (5 Committee members) to adopt LOI or LOIPR. The pre-session takes place the week following the session.
- **Informal private meeting:** Meeting between the pre-sessional working group and CSOs where CSOs give oral input before the LOI is adopted.
- **Informal public meeting:** Meeting between Committee and CSOs where CSOs give oral input before the Concluding Observations are adopted.
- **Lunch time private briefing:** One hour meeting between the Committee and CSOs where CSOs reply to questions asked by Committee members during the Informal public meeting, before the Concluding Observations are adopted.
- **List of Issues (LOI):** List of questions from the Committee to the State in light of its report.
- **Interactive dialogue:** Meeting between the Committee and a State for its review. It is sometimes referred to as constructive dialogue.
- **Concluding Observations:** Document adopted at the end of an interactive dialogue which highlights areas of concern and recommendations.
- **Complaint:** Individual or collective complaint which has unsuccessfully gone through national courts. It cannot be anonymous.
- **Views on individual communications:** Written procedure adopted by Committee in response to a complaint
- **Inquiry:** Examination of systematic abuses in a country following a complaint.
- **Day of General Discussion:** Day separate from the country reviews where CSOs can give a statement to better inform General Recommendations.
- **General Recommendations:** Document that explains the content of the Convention in detail and how it should be implemented by countries.

A full list of definitions can be found [here](#).

## Conclusion

Engaging with the Committee is an opportunity to bring your priorities and issues to the attention of UN experts and can boost your pressure power at national level. As “nothing about us, without us”, the work of the CEDAW Committee should not be without you!

For any questions please contact [EDF Human Rights Officer](#), or email us at [info@edf-feph.orh](mailto:info@edf-feph.orh).