



Guidelines: Creating a Women's Committee

European Disability Forum
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**Guidelines for the creation of a Women's Committee
within organisations of persons with disabilities and
allies**

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About this document

These guidelines are for organisations of persons with disabilities and organisations working for the rights of persons with disabilities.

This document explains the importance and benefits of creating a women's committee. It provides guidance on how to do so.

It is part of **EDF's Gender Mainstreaming Package** aimed at increasing gender mainstreaming and women's rights in organisations of persons with disabilities. More information and other tools can be found on EDFs website.

Introduction

Creating a Women's Committee is an essential step toward promoting gender equality, advocating for women's rights and mainstreaming gender equality. Creating a Women's Committee within your organisation ensure that voices of women and girls with disabilities are heard.

The role of a Women's Committee is to mainstream gender equality and women's rights in all the policies and documents of the organisation, to raise awareness on the situation of women and girls with disabilities and to work towards the inclusion and mainstreaming of the rights of women and girls with disabilities in society.

A Women's Committee also serves as a network for exchanges of information, capacity building and learning, and to support the members amongst each other in order to strengthen the organisation and its members work on promoting the rights of women with disabilities.¹

¹ European Disability Forum, Terms of Reference for the Women's Committee (2022)

You can directly use these guidelines as they are, or you can adapt/translate them into different languages to fit to your national context.

Below is a step-by-step guidance that will support you to establish a Women's Committee in your organisation!

Guidelines to create a Women's Committee

1. Assess the needs and purpose

Objective: Assess the needs and define the purpose and goals of your Women's Committee.²

Action steps:

- **Get started!** Anyone can take the initiative to suggest the creation of a Women's Committee within your organisation.
- **Conduct a needs assessment:** If no internal guidelines to establish a Women's Committee are in place, you can start by conducting a need assessment to understand the needs of your organisation. Engage with women and girls within your organisation or within your members and partners to understand their specific needs, challenges, barriers, requirements, and aspirations.
- **Clarify the committee's purpose:** Start discussing about the mission, vision and values of the Women's Committee. Ensure that the Women's Committee focuses on addressing gender-based issues while also recognising the intersectionality of gender and disability.
- **Establish key objectives:** Some objectives may include advocating for gender inclusive internal and external policies, promoting women's rights, organising public events and campaigns, joining projects, organising trainings, and capacity building

² [The Worker Institute, "A Guide to organizing Women's Committees: Everything You Need to Know to Make a Difference!" \(2015\)](#)

activities, with the objective of raising awareness on gender equality within your organisation, as well as within the disability and feminist movements, and influencing your local, national or European policy makers.

- **Follow a human rights-based approach:** the Women's Committee must be committed to the respect and promotion of a human rights-based approach during its work. The aim is to advance the rights of women and girls with disabilities in line with the CRPD, the General Comments and recommendations of the CRPD Committee³, the CEDAW, and CEDAW Committee's General Recommendation⁴. The terminology used by the Women's Committee should also be in line with the CRPD, CEDAW, and should include intersectional discrimination perspectives.

2. Secure leadership and resources

Objective: Ensure commitment from your organisation's leadership and the community around you.

Action steps:

- **Engage the leadership:** Seek approval or backing from the leadership of your organisation. This can include Board members, Executive Committee members, Director. You can also seek approval and map the capacity of your organisation by sharing a survey.
- **Form a steering group:** When you have the approval, you can create an initial planning group to guide the creation of the Women's Committee. This group can help set foundational goals and structures.

³ For example, the [General comment No.3 on Article 6 – women and girls with disabilities](#)

⁴ [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) and [General Recommendation of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination of Women no. 18](#)

- **Guarantee operational resources:** Advocate for resources (financial, human, or material) to ensure the Women’s Committee’s success.

3. Develop the structure

Objective: Set up an accessible, inclusive, and effective organisational structure.

The structure may depend on internal guidelines your organisation already has regarding the creation of a committee or working group.

Action steps:

- **Determine roles and responsibilities:** Identify roles such as chair(s) and vice chair(s), secretary, members, observers, and the role of the secretariat, while ensuring that responsibilities are clearly defined. (more under points 4 and 6)
- **Ensure accessibility:** Ensure that the Women’s Committee’s meetings, communication methods, and decision-making processes are accessible for everyone. This could include sign language interpretation, captioning, physically accessible meeting rooms, and accessible information and communication materials (such as Easy-to-Read documents). You can also decide if meetings are going to take place virtually or in-person.
- **Set clear guidelines:** Develop a Terms of Reference document that outlines the Women’s Committee’s mission, vision, scope, meeting frequency, communications methods, working language, and decision-making processes. For example, EDF Women’s Committee meets at least twice a year, it is selected every four years after EDF’s General Assembly, and approved by EDF’s Executive Committee. Moreover, EDF Women’s Committee communicate internally via emails, and externally through EDF website, newsletters, social media, etc.

4. Membership

Objective: Gather a diverse group of women and girls with disabilities to participate in the Women's Committee.

Action steps:

- **Develop outreach strategies:** Use various communication methods (including social media, emails, word-of-mouth, newsletters) to encourage women and girls with disabilities to join the Women's Committee.
- **Ensure diversity and inclusivity:** Aim for representation from different types of disabilities, age groups, ethnic backgrounds, and other marginalised communities to ensure that the Women's Committee addresses the needs of all women within your organisation membership. For example, EDF Women's Committee is open to all EDF members as well as independent experts nominated by EDF members⁵ that have expertise in gender equality and the rights of women and girls with disabilities, either at the national and European level.
- **Encourage active participation and confidentiality:** Create an environment where every member feels comfortable contributing and valued.

⁵ With an aim to include 4 members from European full NGO members and 4 full national council members. Women nominated but who were not selected as full members of the Women's Committee can request an observer status to participate in consultations and in meetings, at their own cost or the cost of their organisation.

5. Define roles and responsibilities of members

Objective: Ensure everyone understands their role and responsibility.

Action steps:

- **Define roles of the members:**
Start with the nomination of chair, co-chair(s) or vice chair(s), to steer the work of committee. You can also identify any other role which is relevant for your organisation, for example you can establish focal points or advisors on specific topics.
- **Clarify the responsibility for each role:** Define responsibilities and what is expected from the members, based on their strengths, skills, and interests. This includes estimating the average time to dedicate to their roles, assigning tasks, deciding the process for providing input to documents, establishing the modalities for external participation . You can also define the amount of time allocation required to members in performing different tasks.

6. Create a work programme

Objective: Develop an actionable work programme with specific activities and timelines. The work programme should be done on a yearly basis, but also having a multiannual work programme (i.e. for the duration of the mandate of the committee's members) could be useful to define overall activities. In EDF it is a 4 year work programme, then detailed in yearly list of activities adopted each year by the committee.

Action steps:

- **Identify priorities:** Through discussions, identify key priorities that need attention. That can be internal changes within the organisation, such as working on better gender equality processes and gender mainstreaming, or external actions, such as advocacy campaigns, for example on combating gender-based violence, or banning forced sterilisation.

- **Set measurable goals:** For example, holding workshops on women's rights, establishing mentorship programmes, or launching campaigns to protect the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls with disabilities.
- **Create a timeline and budget:** Develop a clear timeline and budget for activities, ensuring that the Women's Committee stays on track and accountable. The budget is usually managed by the Secretariat of your organisation.

7. Promote knowledge and skills building and sharing

Objective: Equip members with the tools and knowledge they need to contribute to the Committee and for their own personal development, work and advocacy. This includes reasonable accommodations measures.

Action steps:

- **Offer training and skill development:** Provide training on leadership, advocacy, communication, and relevant legal rights, including the intersectionality of gender and disability.
- **Organise knowledge-sharing sessions:** Invite experts to speak on issues such as women's rights, disability inclusion, and gender-based violence, offering practical guidance for committee members.
- **Provide resources:** Share educational materials, policy documents, and research on gender and disability.

8. Monitor and evaluate progress

Objective: Assess the Women's Committee's impact and make necessary improvements. This could include the publication of an annual report describing the activities that the Committee has undertaken during the last year. EDF publishes every year a [report about the work and achievements of the Women's Committee](#).

Action steps:

- **Evaluate the effectiveness and accountability:** Regularly assess the Women's Committee's activities and progress towards its goals. This can be done through surveys, feedback sessions, or reports. For example, EDF Women's Committee is accountable to EDF governing bodies and members of the Women's Committee report to EDF Executive Committee.
- **Celebrate achievements:** Recognise and celebrate successes, whether they are small milestones or significant accomplishments.
- **Make adjustments:** Based on feedback and evaluations, make necessary adjustments to improve the Women's Committee's functioning and impact.

9. Foster ongoing engagement and sustainability

Objective: Ensure the long-term sustainability of the Women's Committee.

Action steps:

- **Build leadership succession:** Encourage leadership development within the Women's Committee to ensure it continues to thrive after initial members transition out. Encourage young women with disabilities to become part of the committee, including through mentorship.
- **Secure long-term funding:** Identify potential sources of funding for the Women's Committee's activities, whether through grants, projects, or organisational budgets.
- **Ensure ongoing involvement:** Foster a culture of active participation and involvement of the Women's Committee in your organisation's work, making the Women's Committee part of the decisions regarding women and girls with disabilities and consulting the Committee on different issues related to gender equality and women's rights.

- **Network with other organisations:** Enhance the external visibility of the Committee by networking, collaborating and building partnerships with other organisations, including women's rights organisations, OPDs, Women's Committees from other organisations. To foster the visibility of your Women's Committee, you can also create a webpage dedicated to its activities and outcomes.

Conclusions

Establishing a Women's Committee is about creating a space for women and girls with disabilities, but also setting the basis to make your organisation more inclusive and gender-equal. A Women's Committee is crucial for strengthening your advocacy towards gender equality and the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities. It helps to raise awareness within your organisation and the broader community, ensuring that the voices of women with disabilities are heard and acted upon.

With a clear sense of purpose, committed leadership, and representative membership, the Committee can influence policies, challenge societal norms and stereotypes, and break down barriers that prevent women and girls with disabilities from fully participating in all aspects of life.

The importance of having a Women's Committee is essential to ensure that women and girls with disabilities are not left behind.