



The United Nations Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

Guide for Organisations of Persons with Disabilities

How to get involved in a country review process and
submit complaints



This is a guide for organisations of persons with disabilities on how to engage with the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). It gives information including **how to participate in a country review** and/or **submit a complaint**.

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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

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 189 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 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 State Parties and serve in their individual capacity. 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.](#)

[FAQ about the CEDAW Convention and CEDAW Committee](#)

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..

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.

CEDAW must be read in light of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its [General Comment No. 3 on women with disabilities](#).

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](#)).

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.

You can provide information on the situation of women and girls with disabilities in your country.

Examples of contributions by DPOs

- [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](#)

Differences between the CEDAW and CRPD Committees

Table of differences between the CEDAW and CRPD Committees

	CEDAW Committee	CRPD Committee
Purpose	Monitors the CEDAW since 1982	Monitors the CRPD since 2006
Membership	23 experts on women's rights	18 experts on disability rights
Meetings	3 per year (3-4 weeks long)	2 per year (4-5 weeks long)
Documents adopted	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
Permanent working group	Working Group on discrimination against women and girl	No

How to get involved in a Country Review

You can **write to the Committee** and **talk to Committee members**. There are **3 sessions per year** in Geneva, Switzerland (usually in March, July, and October). The schedule of past and upcoming sessions [is available online](#).

Below is a timeline of how to get involved in the review. After the timeline, we will go into detail about how to write to the Committee and how to give a presentation at a pre-session. A full list of definitions can be found [here](#). The term Secretariat will be used only in reference to the Secretariat of the Committee.

Reporting

Find out when your country is scheduled for review and submit an alternative report to provide information beyond the State report.

1 year after ratification of the Convention, State Parties must submit an initial report on how the Convention is being implemented. They must then submit a report every 4 years, or whenever requested by the Committee, or following an **optional simplified review procedure**.

Review

Sessions are a week where State Parties give an oral presentation and Committee members ask questions. This is known as “**interactive dialogue**”

The pre-sessions are meetings **one week after the end of regular sessions** at which the pre-sessional working group adopts a LOI or List of Issues Prior to Reporting.

The UN does not provide funding for in person participation.

Pre-Session

Stress which questions the pre-sessional working group should include in the LOI.

On the first day of the pre-session, the **pre-sessional working group has a private informal meeting with CSOs** of countries up for review to ask them questions before they adopt the LOI.

5 members of the Committee (**pre-sessional working group**) review a report and create a **List of Issues (LOIs) or List of Issues Prior to Reporting (LOIPR)**, a list of 20 questions with up to 3 issues each to highlight problems with the implementation and encourage solutions. The LOIs are **published** on the [Committee's website](#) in English a few weeks after the end of the session. The LOIPR is adopted in cases of an optional simplified review procedure.

After pre-session

You can

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

The State Party must respond to the LOIs within 2 to 3 months.

Session

Stress which recommendations should be included in the concluding observations and attend the meeting between the State Party and the Committee.

Interactive dialogues consist of **two 3-hour meetings** where 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.

You may attend the session meeting between the State Party and the Committee but not speak at it. Interactive dialogue are public events streamed [on UN WebTV](#). 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).

Before meeting with the State Parties, 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.

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

After sessions you can **translate the Concluding Observations** to your national language and use them in your advocacy and **organise a press conference** to present the recommendations or follow-up meetings with your government to discuss implementation of the recommendations.

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.

Individual Complaint

Submit an individual communication to the Committee.

If you submit a communication on behalf of an individual, you must have written consent to act on their behalf.

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.**

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

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.

Inquiry

Submit information for inquiry to the Committee.

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

General Recommendations

General Recommendations explain in more detail the content of one or several rights in the Convention and how they should be implemented by countries. 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](#).

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. Consult the [Committee website](#) for information on new general recommendations and instructions on contributions.

More information on review procedures

- [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](#)
- [Examples of concluding observations](#)
- [Individual complaint](#)
- [Inquiry](#)

How to prepare input

Alternative report

Reports must be submitted to the [Secretariat](#) at 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

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

Recommended structure

A short introduction to your organisation/coalition: its history and who it represents. The aim is to establish your credibility.

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.

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.

- 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 the 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.

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.

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)

Statement in Geneva

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.

Statement at Pre-Session

Stress which questions should be included in the LOI.

To participate, send a request to the [Secretariat](#) as you submit your alternative report before the deadline for each session. Check the deadline [announcement on the Committee website](#).

Prepare a very short oral statement on the major issues in your country and submit it in writing by e-mail to the Secretariat a few days before your meeting. All CSOs of one country combined have up to 10 minutes, so you may only have a couple of minutes to speak before Committee members ask questions to the organisations. **Focus on your priorities** and on providing additional information not in your alternative report.

You can participate in person or via videoconference that must be scheduled in advance with the [Secretariat](#). The UN does not provide funding for participation.

Interpretation is provided in English, Spanish, and French. To deliver a statement in other languages, you must bring an interpreter at your own costs.

You can **reach out to EDF and the International Disability Alliance** to let us know that you will be attending the meetings of the Committee so we can support you (info@ida-secretariat.org).

CSOs wishing to make oral interventions may contact IWRAW-Asia Pacific (iwraw-ap@iwraw-ap.org) for support.

Statement at Session

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](#) or contact EDF.

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.

In short

1. Submit an alternative report to the Committee
2. Attend pre-session and suggest questions for the LOI or LOIPR.
You can attend and give oral input.
3. The government replies to the LOI within 2-3 months
4. At session there is the country interactive dialogue and Concluding Observations.
You can attend and give oral input.
5. The government must implement the **Concluding Observations.**

Definition recap

- **List of Issues (LOI):** List of questions from the Committee to the State in light of its report.
- **Informal private meeting:** Meeting between the pre-sessional working group and CSOs where CSOs give oral input before the LOI is adopted.
- **Session:** Gathering in Geneva hosted by the Committee during which take place country reviews.
- **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.
- **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.

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