

# Technical brief: Disability Inclusion, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

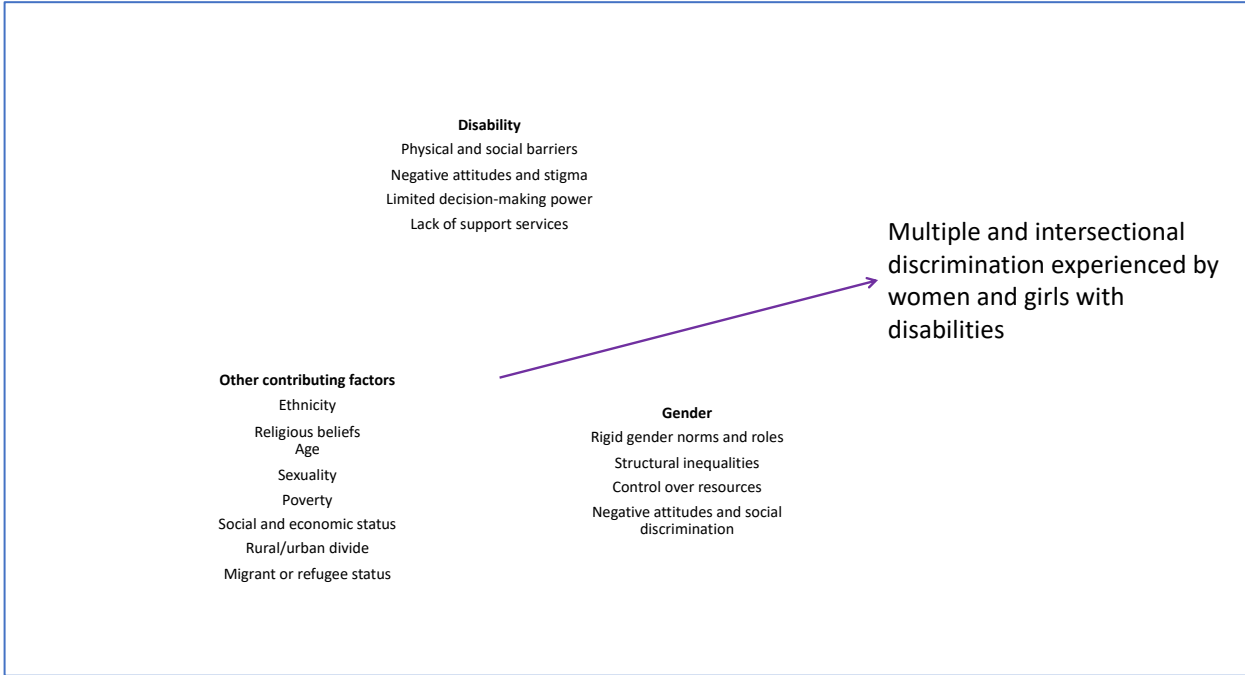
This brief provides short guidance on how to take a disability inclusive approach to gender equality and women's empowerment to support the work of the European Union in creating a gender equal world.

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# 1. Achieving gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls

Gender equality is central to human rights and to EU external cooperation. It is a concern for sustainable societies because no society can develop – economically, politically, or socially – when half of its population is marginalized. Over recent years, it has become clear that the impact of gender inequality is not the same for everyone and it can be further compounded for marginalised groups e.g. persons with disabilities. Discrimination and exclusion from many areas of life is commonly experienced by persons with disabilities, and within the disability population itself, there are also differing experiences of inequality and discrimination, in particular when disability and gender intersects.



# 2. Understanding the specific concerns of women and girls with disabilities

Global prevalence is greater for women with disabilities than men with disabilities, 19 per cent compared with 12 per cent, respectively. In low and middle-income countries, women are estimated to form up to three-quarters of persons with disabilities. Despite forming an important part of the population, women and girls with disabilities are generally invisible in development policies and programmes. Their specific concerns are often viewed as separate or distinct from the themes that are important for gender equality. For example, women and girls with disabilities are not referenced in SDG 5 of the 2030 agenda. As a result, disability inclusion in gender and women's empowerment programmes can be overlooked.

[The EU Gender Action Plan \(GAP\) III](#) and its six key areas of engagement underpin the drive for gender equality and women’s empowerment in EU external action. By including the specific concerns of women and girls with disabilities through applying a disability inclusive approach to the key areas, the human rights and socio-economic outcomes for women and girls with disabilities can be improved.

**Box 1 EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III and disability inclusion<sup>1</sup>**

GAP III six key areas of engagement	Specific disability inclusion concerns
Gender-based violence and access to justice	<p>Women and girls with disabilities are at greater risk of violence and abuse, including emotional, sexual, and physical violence.</p> <p>Gaining access to justice is challenging due to communication and physical barriers e.g. inaccessibility of police stations, shelters and safe housing do not provide sign language interpreters, negative attitudes about the capacity of women and girls with disabilities, specifically women with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities; and lack of availability of networks and support to assist with reporting violence and accessing follow-on services.</p>
Universal access to sexual and reproductive health rights	<p>Lack of accessibility at health facilities and health staff that are not trained on disability or health information in inaccessible formats, result in women and girls with disabilities having restricted access to SRHS.</p> <p>Disability and gender-based stereotypes also affect access, with many health care staff believing that women and girls with disabilities are asexual, not requiring SRH services and incapable of motherhood.</p>
Economic and social rights and the empowerment of women and girls	<p>Women with disabilities face the same economic inequalities as women without disabilities, but often it is further compounded by disability-related stigma and discrimination.</p> <p>They are at greater risk of poverty than men with disabilities, because of lower access to education and vocational skills development opportunities. This negatively affects women with disabilities' possibilities to work and gain their economic independence as compared to men with disabilities and women without disabilities.</p>
Advancing equal participation, and leadership	<p>Women with disabilities' representation in society, in decision making and political life, is still limited. While evidence is scarce, women with disabilities have exceptionally low participation rates in parliament.</p> <p>Leadership roles of women with disabilities are also low within organisations representing persons with disabilities.</p>

<sup>1</sup> Refer [to Annex 1 reference and reading list](#) for evidence presented in this table

Integrating the women, peace, and security agenda	<p>Women with disabilities are particularly vulnerable during times of conflict and displacement and may be uniquely at risk of human trafficking during and after conflicts.</p> <p>At the same time, they are often excluded from peace agendas and diplomacy despite having the capacity to be active contributors, including in community resolution and social cohesion activities.</p>
Addressing the challenges and harnessing the opportunities offered by the green transition and the digital transformation	<p>Women and girls with disabilities are particularly challenged by climate change and at higher risks of experiencing adverse effects, including impacts on their health, food security, housing, education, water and sanitation, livelihoods, and mobility.</p> <p>Harnessing the opportunities that come from transitioning to a green economy while also addressing the gender digital divide can enable women with disabilities to gain direct access to employment through online recruiting platforms. Digital tools can also support them in their daily tasks at the workplace, amongst other opportunities.</p>

### 3. Developing disability inclusive gender programmes

To support disability inclusive gender programmes in EU external action, this section provides guidance on how to integrate an intersectional approach to disability and gender in three steps of the intervention cycle – gender analysis in the context and problem analysis, formulate gender and disability inclusive interventions and monitor and evaluate progress on better outcomes for women and girls with disabilities.

#### 3.1 Asking disability related questions in gender analysis

Taking a disability inclusive approach to a gender analysis does not mean creating a whole new framework of analysis. It is a way to ensure a gender analysis is more inclusive of those who have been traditionally left out, such as women and girls with disabilities. Asking the right questions at the analysis stage helps to find the structural barriers that discriminate against women, including the specific concerns of women with disabilities. This will provide a broader understanding of the social structures and power relations that create or maintain inequalities, and which creates different outcomes for women with and without disabilities as compared to men.<sup>2</sup>

Example of gender analysis questions:

- **Assets** – do women and men with disabilities have equal access to resources, and if not, what are the differences? Do they have equal access to networks and to participate in development programmes?

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<sup>2</sup> More information on how to find and gather information on disability can be found in the Guidance note - Disability inclusion in EU external action, chapter 5.

- **Knowledge, beliefs, and perceptions** – are there gender stereotypes between women and men with disabilities? Do women with disabilities experience more discrimination and exclusion than men with disabilities or as compared to women without disabilities? Are women with disabilities viewed as unable to fulfil social roles within the community?
- **Practices and participation** – Do women with disabilities engage in practices that society traditionally considers ‘male’? Are women with disabilities participation rate equal to men with disabilities in key domains such as education and employment? And what is the situation compared to women without disabilities?
- **Time and space** – do women with disabilities spend more time on housework and child rearing than men with disabilities? In a household with a child or a parent with a disability, does the role of caring fall to the females in house?
- **Legal rights and status** – are there customary laws that prevent persons with disabilities, and particularly women with disabilities from owning land, managing financial assets, or accessing certain types of professions? Are they discriminated from voting in elections or being able to marry and bear children?
- **Power and decision making** – Do women with disabilities have the power to make their own decisions related to employment, housing, education, health care, etc.? Do men and women with disabilities live independently or are they encouraged or forced to live with family or in institutions? Is this consistent with the legal or cultural norms and is it consistent with the practices of people without disabilities?

See [Annex 2](#) for more examples of questions on women and girls with disabilities that could be used for both gender analysis and the overall context analysis during programming related to EU gender thematic priorities.

### 3.2 Formulating gender and disability inclusive interventions

Including questions on disability inclusion in the context and problem analysis as well as any gender analysis, helps guide the formulation of a disability inclusive intervention. Consulting directly women and girls with disabilities and their representative organisations is important to collect the information and understand better how to address barriers and encourage participation.

In applying the specific concerns of women and girls with disabilities to gender programmes, key elements can include:

- Measures that remove barriers to participation by women and girls with disabilities by addressing accessibility and reasonable accommodation and ensure other support for participation.
- Disaggregate data by sex, age, and disability. In the intervention logic and the logical framework for example, in the log-frame for example, using tools such as the [Washington Group Questions](#) or other recognized data collection tools, can support the measurement of women and girls with disabilities’ participation on programmes.
- Resource allocation/budget to ensure the planned intervention can address accessibility, reasonable accommodation, and other measures to increase participation of women and girls with disabilities.

## Box 2 Examples of gender and disability inclusion measures

### ACCESSIBILITY

Women and girls with disabilities can have different access requirements than men with disabilities and women without disabilities. Some illustrative example of accessibility measures are:

- **GBV prevention and programmes:** Accessible housing and shelter for women and girls escaping gender-based violence. Programmes supporting GBV prevention and survivor protection must consider that shelters are physically accessible and the communication and information they provide is available in alternative formats, (audio, easy-to-read format), and that assistance is provided for daily life support etc.
- **WASH programmes:** Ensuring accessibility and related standards when improving or constructing WASH facilities, and ensuring adaptations are informed by consulting with women and girls with disabilities, will ensure better outcomes. Such measures may require separate and accessible latrines for girls, water sources installed near the house, accessible water pumps and distribution, or hygiene awareness campaigns provided in alternative formats and channels.
- **Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH):** Accessible health-care facilities and equipment, including accessible gynaecological examination beds for women will help with better SRH outcomes for women and girls with disabilities. Health information and promotion available in accessible formats is also important so women with diverse types of disabilities have access to essential information related to SRH.
- **VET and entrepreneur programmes:** Accessible and inclusive measures to enhance women with disabilities' vocational skills and livelihood opportunities may require a specific budget for allowing adaptations to vocational training centres or support for accessible transportation means.

### REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION

Providing necessary and proper modification and adjustments to ensure persons with disabilities can access a programme or a service is mandated by law in many countries. It is also good practice to do. For women and girls with disabilities, having access to services can require reasonable accommodation, for example:

- For referral of women with disabilities to protection services, police, and justice as survivors of GBV, deaf women will require sign language interpretation and women with intellectual disabilities or psychosocial disabilities may need a support person at judicial services or counselling.
- Women with disabilities who are breast-feeding may require an accessible space within the workplace or training centre.
- Women with disabilities requiring a physically accessible mammogram machine at a health centre, or a woman with an intellectual disability who has difficulties understanding the health procedure requiring a support person.

### OTHER SUPPORT FOR PARTICIPATION

In addition to accessibility and reasonable accommodation, other support and disability services may also be needed for ensuring women and girls with disabilities are able to participate on an equal basis with others in their community. Some examples are:

- Availability of accessible and affordable child-care is an important concern for parents, and still particularly for women, and especially for women with disabilities' participation for example in training programmes or in livelihood opportunities. Many women with disabilities are at an increased risk of poverty, while also incurring additional disability related costs, for example needing to use accessible transport which very often are provided through private companies. Ensuring that a child-care facility is affordable, has physical access and is easily found in nearby facilitates will enhance mothers with disabilities' participation in economy and society.
- The misconceptions about women and girls with disabilities being less capable can result in them being viewed as not able to undertake education, training, and other services. This belief can be held by both their family and the wider community, creating barriers to participation. Awareness raising and disability equality training led by women with disabilities' organisations to change attitudes is an important measure to address negative stereotypes.
- Actively reaching out to women and girls with disabilities to take part in mainstream actions, for example actively recruit young women with disabilities into a VET programme, or an entrepreneurial initiative, or proactively support girls with disabilities to take part in youth leadership programmes.

### 3.3 Monitor and evaluate progress on better outcomes

From the early design of the intervention, consultations should include organisations of persons with disabilities, and particularly ensuring that women with disabilities are represented, which will help to include disability and gender sensitive indicators in the theory of change and results framework developed.

Collecting and analysing data and information about women and girls with disabilities is an important part of monitoring progress for the following reasons:

- Having access to disaggregated data on sex, age and disability can highlight the intersectional discrimination faced by women with disabilities and in turn help shape programme design.
- The [EU revised results framework](#) provides further guidance on indicators to measure progress on SDG 4 (Education) and SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth), which are to be disaggregated by sex, and where possible also age and disability.
- Using the DAC markers to design and track disability and gender inclusive aid is important. Both, the Gender Equality and the Disability Inclusion marker<sup>3</sup>, enables the collection of data under their specific categories for reporting on EU's investment on gender equality and disability inclusion in external action.
- Any evaluation should include disability inclusion and gender expertise in the evaluation team to capture the differential impacts that a programme has had between women and men with disabilities and provide recommendations based on these findings.

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<sup>3</sup> See further information on how to apply the DI Marker in the Briefing note on the Disability Policy marker in the Guidance note on disability inclusion in EU external action.



**Example: Disability inclusion in data-base on GBV services**

An EU multi-country programme funding a network of GBV referral services for women who are at risk of gender based violence. The programme tracks the services available for women in five African countries and records data on the number of women who register and take up services in emergency shelter, counselling, and judicial services. The database set up to collect the data from the network, disaggregates the data collected based on age, sex, and disability.

## Annex 1: References for disability and gender themes

### Gender-based violence and access to justice

- UN DESA (2018). "[Disability and Development Report. Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls with disabilities \(Goal 5\)](#)", p.7.
- Ortoleva S. and Lewis H. (2012). "[Forgotten Sisters - A Report on Violence against Women with Disabilities: An Overview of Its Nature, Scope, Causes and Consequence](#)".
- Astbury and Walji (2013). "[Triple Jeopardy: Gender-based violence and human rights violations experienced by women with disabilities in Cambodia.](#)" AusAID Research Working Paper 1.
- UNHR (2020). "[International Principles and Guidelines on Access to Justice for Persons with Disabilities.](#)" See pp. 21 and 27 for gender specific references related to access for justice.

### Universal access to sexual and reproductive health rights

- UN DESA (2018). [Infographic on accessing sexual and reproductive health services and reproductive rights for all persons with disabilities.](#)
- UNFPA (2018). "[Women and Young Persons with Disabilities ; Guidelines for Providing Rights-Based and Gender-Responsive Services to Address Gender-Based Violence and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights,](#)" pp. 49-50.

### Economic and social rights and the empowerment of women and girls

- UN Women (2017). "[Making the SDGs count for women and girls with disabilities.](#)" Issue Brief, p. 3.
- UN DESA (2018). "[Disability and Development Report.](#)"
  - See section H: Promoting full and productive employment and decent work for persons with disabilities (Goal 8), p. 152, which highlights lower rate of participation of women with disabilities in the labour force.
  - See further section E: Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls with disabilities (Goal 5); p. 99.

### Advancing equal participation, and leadership in political life

- Institute of Development Studies (2018). "[Strengthening participation of people with disabilities in leadership roles in developing countries.](#)" Helpdesk report K4D. To get sense of barriers to political participation and leadership see p. 5, and particularly on women's empowerment on p. 7.
- UN Women (2018). "[Leadership and political participation of women with disabilities.](#)" In brief. Page 2 gives some further facts.

### Integrating the women, peace, and security agenda

Ortoleva, S. "[Women with Disabilities: The Forgotten Peace Builder,](#)" 33 Loy. L.A. Int'l & Comp. L. Rev. 83 (2010).

UNGA (2021). "[Report on the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of armed conflict.](#)" [A/76/146.](#) Thematic report.

## Addressing the challenges and harnessing the opportunities offered by the green transition and the digital transformation

- OHCHR (2020). "[Analytical study on the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change.](#)" Report of the OHCHR. See p.5 paragraph 12 on how climate change impact women with disabilities.
- ILO and Global Business and Disability Network (2021). "[An inclusive digital economy for people with disabilities.](#)" See for references on how to ensure women with disabilities benefit from measures promoting inclusive digital economy.
- GSMA (2020). "[The Digital Exclusion of women with disabilities.](#) A study of seven low- and middle-income countries." Some of the findings included: Women with disabilities have among the lowest rates of mobile and smartphone ownership. In most countries, ownership gaps are widest between men without disabilities and women with disabilities. Common barriers reported to mobile ownership in were: relevance, literacy and skills, and safety and security.

## Annex 2: Sector specific questions to analyse disability and gender

<p><b>Gender-Based Violence (GBV)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the legal framework prevent violence against women? Does it include measures to protect women/girls with disabilities?</li> <li>• Have the laws governing GBV considered disability related aspects of legal capacity?</li> <li>• Is there a national policy on GBV prevention? Does it include measures to promote and ensure the rights of women/girls with disabilities?</li> <li>• Is there national data collected on GBV crimes? Is the data disability disaggregated?</li> <li>• Is there evidence of the police and judicial systems incorporating reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities. For example, sign interpreters in police stations? Training for judges on disability rights?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Universal access to sexual and reproductive health rights</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the legal framework protect sexual and reproductive rights of women with disabilities?</li> <li>• If women are free to make decisions on family planning, can women with disabilities make decisions, without fear of coercion or forced treatment?</li> <li>• If there is a national policy promoting the sexual health and reproductive rights of women, does it include measures targeting women/girls with disabilities?</li> <li>• Has disability inclusion been included in staff training for health-care professionals?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Economic and social rights and the empowerment of girls</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the legal framework provide for the equal participation of girls and women with disabilities in education and decent work, including employment?</li> <li>• Are girls with disabilities included in national targets for improving participation of girls in education?</li> <li>• If there is a national policy promoting women's participation in the workforce, does it include women with disabilities?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Have women with disabilities being included in government and private sector programmes that promote entrepreneurship?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Women’s participation, and leadership in political and social life</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Does the legal framework include laws that prevent women with disabilities from being elected?</li> <li>● If there is a national programme promoting women’s leadership – are women with disabilities part of the target group?</li> <li>● How are women with disabilities represented in national disability mechanisms and gender equality institutions?</li> <li>● Is there a formalised network of organisations of persons with disabilities (OPD) within the country? How are women involved and represented in these OPDs? Is there separate representation for women with disabilities?</li> </ul>

## Annex 3: Tools and resources

There are several resources that can provide more detailed information on how to ensure a disability and gender inclusive approach in EU external action. .

<b>Understanding the key issues</b>	<p><a href="#">UN Women Series Briefs on Women and Girls with Disabilities</a></p> <p><a href="#">UN Women: Making the SDGs count for women and girls with disabilities</a></p> <p><a href="#">UN Women: The empowerment of women and girls with disabilities</a></p> <p><a href="#">UN Women: Leadership and political participation of women with disabilities</a></p> <p><a href="#">World Bank Brief on Violence Against Women and Girl with Disabilities</a></p> <p><a href="#">UNFPA Report on the Impact of COVID19 on Women and Girls with Disabilities</a></p> <p><a href="#">United Nations Girls Education Initiative: Leave no girl with disabilities behind.</a></p>
<b>Toolkits for disability and gender intersectional analysis</b>	<p>UN Women <a href="#">Intersectionality guide and resource toolkit</a></p> <p>CBM: <a href="#">Disability and Gender Analysis toolkit</a></p>
<b>Monitoring progress on human rights and gender equality</b>	<p><a href="#">Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities expert committee General comment no 3 on Article 6 - women and girls with disabilities</a></p> <p><a href="#">SDG-CRPD resource package: Disability-inclusive Sustainable Development Goals. Gender equality.</a></p> <p><a href="#">SDG-CRPD resource page: Illustrative indicators on Article 6 on Women with Disabilities.</a></p> <p><a href="#">See individual State reporting to the CRPD committee, on the implementation of Article 6 on Women with Disabilities.</a></p>