



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

Guide for Organisations of Persons with Disabilities



Toolkit edited in September 2023



Funded by
the European Union

This publication has received financial support from the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission's CERV Programme. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Table of Contents

Abbreviations.....	3
Summary	4
The United Nations Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.....	5
What CEDAW needs from DPOs.....	6
Examples of contributions by DPOs	6
Differences between the CEDAW and CRPD Committees	7
Main functions of the CEDAW Committee	7
How to get involved in a Country Review	8
Reporting	8
Review	9
Pre-Session	9
Session	10
Summary	11
How to prepare input.....	12
Alternative report or shadow report	12
Recommended structure.....	13
Examples of alternative reports	14
Oral statement in Geneva	14
Statement at Pre-Session: informal private meeting.....	15
Statement at Session: informal public meeting and private lunch time	16
How to submit individual complaints.....	16
How to submit information for inquiry	17
How to contribute to General Recommendations	17
In short.....	18
More information on procedures	19
Definition recap	19
Document credits.....	21

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**

Abbreviations

- **CEDAW** – United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
- **CEDAW Committee** - United Nations Committee on the Elimination 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 a non-exhaustive list of organisations, networks and committees of women with disabilities in Europe](#))
- **LOIs** – List of issues
- **LOIPR** – List of Issues Prior to Reporting
- **UN** - United Nations

Summary

This document provides practical guidance to organisations both of and for persons with disabilities on how to interact with the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee) to defend their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

This guide provides practical information on the following aspects:

- Committee functioning.
- Participation in the review of the periodic reports of the States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).
- Submission of information for the days of general discussion and general recommendations.
- Application for inquiries.

Participation in the work of the CEDAW Committee is a unique opportunity to present the priorities and complaints of organisations of persons with disabilities to UN experts, as well as to strengthen advocacy at the national level.

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.**

CEDAW has an [Optional Protocol](#) (2000), which allows for individual complaints by individuals or groups of individuals and for inquiries into systematic violations of women's rights in a State party. 114 states have ratified the protocol so far.

The [United Nations Committee on the Elimination of 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 four-year terms and are eligible for re-election once. A Chairperson, 3 Vice-Chairpersons and a Rapporteur, representing the five regional groups¹, are appointed among the members of the Committee for two years.

[The full list of the current members of the Committee and their curriculum vitae 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..

¹ Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific, Western Europe and Other States, and Eastern Europe.

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 Comment No. 7 on Participation of persons with disabilities, through their representative organisations, in the implementation and monitoring of the Convention](#) ([Easy to Read English version here](#)).

The CRPD does not fully cover the multiple issues of women, nor does CEDAW fully cover issues affecting women with disabilities.

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 to share firsthand information.

Ana Peláez Narváez (EDF Vice President) was the first woman [from the disability movement](#) elected to the Committee in 2018.

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

The members of the EDF Youth Committee can provide interventions, trainings, or workshops.

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

Main functions of the CEDAW Committee

1. Examination of the application of CEDAW by the States Parties (Art. 18 of the Convention)
2. Examination of individual communications (Art. 2 of the Optional Protocol)
3. Investigation procedure (Art. 8 Optional Protocol)
4. Preparation of general recommendations (Art. 21 of the Convention)
5. Collaboration with specialised agencies of the United Nations (Art. 22 of the Convention)

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 of technical terms related to the treaty bodies can be found online](#). The term Secretariat will be used only in reference to the Secretariat of the Committee.

Reporting

States that have ratified CEDAW must submit regular - or in a technical word of the UN "periodic" - reports to the Committee on how they are implementing the Convention's rights.

Your role

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

The Committee usually invites 8 States parties to submit their reports at each session.

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

Your role

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

Your role

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

An interactive dialogue is normally held each day with a State Party, with a total of 4 States Parties in all.

It consists 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.

Your role

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.

Summary

The phases for the initial and periodic examination can be summarised in the following steps:

- 0)** The State Party submits its report to the Committee.
- 1)** Pre-sessional meeting in Geneva: the pre-sessional working group for the country adopts the LOI.
- 2)** The Government of the State Party presents its responses to the LOI within two or three months.
- 3)** Period of sessions in Geneva: the Committee's experts have an interactive dialogue with the country.
- 4)** Period of sessions in Geneva: the Committee will approve the final observations and the State Party will have to implement them.
- 5)** Follow-up of the Final Observations

How to prepare input

Alternative report or shadow report

Reports from civil society organisations are called “alternative reports” or “shadow reports”.

There are 3 times when shadow reports can be submitted to the Committee.

1. Report for the elaboration of the list of questions:

This report shall provide information to assist the Committee in developing the List of Issues and Questions or the List of Issues and Questions Prior to Reporting.

2. Report for the session with the State:

This report must provide additional information to that submitted by the State Party in its report that the Committee will use during the dialogue with the State Party and to prepare the corresponding Concluding Observations.

3. Report for the follow-up to the Concluding Observations:

This report should focus on the follow-up issues indicated in the Concluding Observations by the Committee, reporting whether the State Party has implemented the recommendations and to what extent.

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

- **Word limit:** 3,300 words for DPOs and 6,600 words for CSO coalitions
- **Language:** They must be submitted in one of the working languages of the Committee: **English, French or Spanish.**

- **Format:** Word format (**not PDF**)

Reports under the follow-up to the concluding observations procedure have a word limit of 3,500 words.

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)

Oral statement in Geneva

Information about oral statements is given before each session in the document on "Participation by Non-Governmental Organisations".

There are **public** and **private** meetings.

NGOs can decide whether they wish to participate in these meetings either physically or remotely via Zoom.

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: informal private meeting

Your role

Stress which questions should be included in the LOI.

To participate, send a request to the [Secretariat at ohchr-cedaw@un.org](mailto:Secretariat@ohchr-cedaw@un.org), with copy to iwraw-ap@iwraw-ap.org, 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.

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: informal public meeting and private lunch time

Your role

Stress which recommendations should be included in the concluding observations.

To participate you must send a request to the [Secretariat](mailto:Secretariat@ohchr-cedaw@un.org) at ohchr-cedaw@un.org, with copy to iwraw-ap@iwraw-ap.org, (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.

There is also an informal private lunchtime meeting that takes place prior to the Committee's dialogue with the State party concerned. CSOs are requested to give answers to the questions from the private public meeting, during the private meeting.

How to submit individual complaints

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.

How to submit information for inquiry

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](#).

How to contribute to 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 [39 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.

The Committee follows a three-stage process for formulating general recommendations:

1. Holding an **open dialogue** between the Committee, NGOs and others on the topic of the general recommendation during half a day of general discussion. Specialised agencies and other United Nations bodies, as well as NGOs, are encouraged to participate in this discussion and submit informal reference papers.
2. **Drafting the overall recommendations.** Specialists can participate in the preparation of the general recommendation project.
3. **Adopting the revised draft** in the subsequent session by the Committee.

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.**

More information on procedures

- [The review process- Rules of procedure and working methods](#)
- [The simplified review procedure](#)
- [The list of countries that accepted to be reviewed](#) under the simplified review procedure
- [Information on the follow-up to concluding observation 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 procedure](#)
- [EDF's Mapping of organisations of women with disabilities and committees in Europe](#)

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

Document credits

Authors: Madeline Escourt, Matilda Apio

Editors: Naomi Mabita, EDF former Communications Assistant and
Samaneh Shabani, EDF Women's Officer

Director of publication: Marine Uldry, EDF Human Rights Coordinator

For any questions, please email us at info@edf-feeph.org.



The European Disability Forum
Mundo Madou
Avenue des Arts 7-8
1210 Brussels, Belgium.

www.edf-feeph.org
info@edf-feeph.org



Funded by
the European Union

This publication has received financial support from the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission's CERV Programme. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.